

**Study  
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## **Results and Recommendations from a Survey of Army Deserters and Leaders**

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# RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM A SURVEY OF ARMY DESERTERS AND LEADERS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### Requirement:

Although still relatively rare, the Army has seen an increase in the number of Soldiers going AWOL. Further, a significant proportion of such individuals remain absent beyond 30 days, at which point they are classified as deserters. To better understand this phenomenon, the Army G-1 requested that the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) conduct a study that included deserters and individuals in leadership positions to gain insight from both perspectives on why AWOL and desertion occur and what, if anything, can be done to prevent them. This report focuses on the results of a survey of individuals who deserted the Army and were subsequently returned to military control. First-line supervisors of Soldiers in training were also surveyed on this topic. A secondary goal of this effort was to develop a method for collecting data regarding desertion on an on-going basis should the Army choose to do so. Recommendations in this regard are also provided.

### Procedures:

A draft Returning Soldier Questionnaire (RSQ) was developed for review by ARI and the G-1. Suggested revisions were incorporated into the final instrument, which included three broad sections. The first sought information on why respondents enlisted in the Army. Section II addressed aspects of the individual's situation: (a) before going AWOL (e.g., how long they were in the Army, how long before leaving did they think about doing so, why they left); (b) while AWOL (e.g., where they went, how long they were gone); and (c) upon return (e.g., what will happen to them next). The final group of items sought background information, including gender, age/marital status/rank when they left the Army, highest level of education, and whether respondents received in-service disciplinary actions. When finalized, the 34-item survey was printed in machine-readable form.

Contractor personnel worked with individuals at the Personnel Control Facilities (PCFs) at Fort Knox, KY and Fort Sill, OK to develop a schedule for data collection. Approximately once a week over a 6-month period, research staff members would go to the PCF to administer the RSQ to deserters who had been returned to military control (RMC) since the previous session was conducted. On average, it took respondents 45 minutes to complete the surveys, which they then sealed in envelopes to protect their anonymity. On a periodic basis, the sealed envelopes were returned in batches to the survey processing center, where they were opened and checked to make sure they could be properly processed. At the completion of the data collection period, the surveys were scanned and a database assembled. A total of 544 completed surveys were received, of which 429 indicated they had deserted from training and thus were eligible for inclusion in the analyses.

The RSQ included three open-ended items that asked (a) why the respondent left the Army, (b) why he/she didn't choose some other course of action, and (c) what could have been done to prevent him or her from leaving. In addition, nine items with response options also included an "other" category, with a space for the respondent to specify his or her answer. The verbatim written responses from these items were transcribed into a file.

Another survey was designed to ascertain supervisor views in regard to AWOL and desertion. The 30-item form contained background questions (e.g., rank, Army tenure), along with a series of items that requested information about a case of desertion with which the respondent was familiar (e.g., ratings of the Soldier, views on why he/she took absence without leave). In addition, some general questions about AWOL/desertion were included. A total of 241 supervisors stationed at Fort Knox, KY were administered the survey over a two-week period. Completed surveys were returned and checked before scanning. Open-ended responses were content-coded and entered into the database.

## Findings

Although males make up 85% of active duty Soldiers, the percentage of males in the RSQ sample was somewhat higher, at 89%. Over 50% of respondents were 20 years old or less at the time they went AWOL, and 40% said they were single and never married at that time. Over two-thirds indicated they had a high school diploma or certificate, and over one quarter (27%) had some college experience. Although only 4% were non-high school graduates, this is slightly higher than in the overall enlisted force, where individuals with less than a high school diploma only account for 1% of Soldiers. Nearly half of the respondents were in Combat occupations, and over half identified their rank as E-1. Finally, 9% of these deserters said they needed a waiver to enter the Army, and 26% indicated they had disciplinary actions against them while in service. These results largely coincide with previous research that found deserters to be less educated, more likely to have pre-service delinquencies, be of lower rank, and more often in Combat occupations.

Reasons for enlisting were contrasted with a similar item administered to Soldiers who entered the Army in FY 1999. One major difference noted was that while 11% of Soldiers in the 1999 cohort cited getting away from a personal problem as a very or extremely important reason for enlisting, 24% of deserters selected this as an influence. Overall, a much higher percentage of 1999 cohort Soldiers identified motivations related to self-improvement and security (e.g., training (75% vs. 24%), self discipline (66% vs. 21%), pay (56% vs. 15%), and job security (67% vs. 15%)) as important than did RSQ respondents.

Over half of these deserters (65%) left the Army within 6 months of enlisting; however, 42% had completed basic training and were in Advanced Individual Training (AIT) before departing. The highest percentage of respondents (38%) said they did not

think about going AWOL before they left, and 29% indicated that they only considered it within days of taking leave. The majority reported that they sought help with their problems before they left, although 41% said they either had no problems or did not seek assistance. Finally, only 27% of RSQ respondents stated that they had no intention of returning to the Army when they left, while the majority were not sure how long they would be gone.

The primary reasons cited for going AWOL centered on dissatisfaction with Army life (40%), family problems (39%), homesickness (37%), feelings that promises made upon enlistment were not kept (27%), a lack of motivation (26%), and unfair treatment (21%). When asked what could have been done to prevent them from going AWOL, the most frequently selected options were telling the truth about Army life prior to enlistment (61%), allowing more family contact (51%), and treating Soldiers better (40%).

The sample was evenly split in terms of whether they returned to the Army voluntarily, or were apprehended. This was highly related to length of absence, with nearly three quarters of those gone less than 6 months returning on their own, and about two thirds of those gone longer than 6 months having been caught. The most frequently cited reason for coming back voluntarily was that it made life simpler.

The 241 supervisor respondents from Fort Knox, KY all held the rank of Sergeant. The respondents who were aware of a case of desertion (66%) completed a series of questions about that individual. Nearly all of the deserters named were male (99%), and the vast majority (88%) took absence without leave from a training unit. As with the deserters themselves, supervisors indicated that homesickness (62%) and dissatisfaction with Army life (51%) were primary causes of the Soldier departing. However, large proportions of supervisors also suggested that a lack of motivation (55%) and an inability to meet conduct standards (42%) played a role in causing the Soldier to go AWOL. Supervisors generally gave low ratings of deserters on a variety of dimensions. They were rated low on their ability to deal with family problems (75%), their adaptation (70%) and their commitment (69%) to the Army, their ability to balance personal and work demands (67%), their motivation (65%), and their satisfaction with the Army (62%).

When asked what steps might have been taken to prevent the Soldier from deserting, 44% of supervisors indicated that he/she should have been better screened before entering the Army. Over one third (36%) suggested that increasing the punishment for going AWOL would have deterred the Soldier from taking unauthorized leave, while 22% said nothing would have had an impact in this regard. A total of 44 supervisors indicated that the deserter to whom they were referring in the survey had been returned to the Army. The remainder of those who responded to this question indicated that he/she had not returned or they were not sure of the status of the case (102), and of this number 96% felt that punishment should be exacted upon the Soldier's return, and that rehabilitation efforts would not be warranted (78%).

Approximately three quarters of supervisors felt that the punishment for going AWOL is too lenient (77%), and that increasing the toll exacted for this action would decrease its occurrence (74%). Majorities also agreed that returning AWOL Soldiers to their units has a negative impact (74%), and that making it easier to discharge Soldiers who are not working out would lessen the frequency of AWOL/desertion (72%). On the other hand, there was widespread disagreement with the idea that Soldiers should be released if they no longer wish to be in the Army (63%), and with the notion of returning deserters to the units from which they took leave (68%). Nearly half of supervisors agreed that the Army needs to provide more assistance to Soldiers to prevent desertion (44%), and that the Army should provide more/better training to leaders in the area of dealing with problem Soldiers (42%).

### Utilization of Findings

The survey results provide several insights into the antecedents to desertion and the potential for initiating interventions to control it. In addition, valuable experience was gained regarding how such data collections should be conducted in the future.

Intervening with Soldiers who may be considering going AWOL may be difficult for two reasons. First, it appears that a large number of those who take this step do so on impulse or after only considering it for a short time. In addition, many do not seek help with the problems they are experiencing prior to leaving. This suggests that diligence is needed in monitoring Soldiers who may be experiencing difficulties or they may leave before anything can be done to intervene.

The results suggest that many individuals who desert may in fact be potentially reclaimable. This is based on the fact that only 27% of these deserters left the Army with no intention of returning. Further, the largest percentage of respondents indicated that their reasons for leaving were personal, usually involving family problems that needed to be resolved. A relatively large percentage (39%) of supervisors also indicated that family problems formed the basis of the case of desertion to which they referred. Avenues for assisting Soldiers in coping with homesickness and family problems (e.g., more family contact, extended leave), may contribute to a decrease in the incidence of desertion.

Supervisors clearly believe that Soldiers who desert should be punished more severely than is currently the case, and that doing so would decrease the frequency of unauthorized absences. They also felt strongly that returning deserters to their units is ill advised. Supervisor responses suggest that more or better training in the area of dealing with problem Soldiers may be beneficial, as would providing more/better assistance to individuals who are experiencing problems.

The survey implementation process went relatively smoothly, suggesting that a similar procedure can be used in the future, should the Army choose to continue collecting such data. Finally, the survey itself provided a complete picture of the situation surrounding desertions, and the addition of several response alternatives to existing questions could mitigate the need for open-ended items.

# RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM A SURVEY OF ARMY DESERTERS AND LEADERS

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## **Results and Recommendations from a Survey of Army Deserters and Leaders**

### **Background**

The problem of Soldiers taking unauthorized leave from their units is one that has been recorded throughout history. It has also been a difficulty experienced by the United States Army from its inception at the time of the Revolutionary War. Obviously, Soldiers being absent without leave (AWOL) and deserting is a troubling phenomenon whenever it occurs. But the fact is, the Army has seen substantial increases in this regard over the past several years. In response to this, The Army G-1 asked the Army Research Institute (ARI) to initiate a study to update and expand upon what is already known about desertion in order to inform efforts to prevent it from happening and increase positive outcomes in cases where it does occur (e.g., reclaim individuals as successful Soldiers).

The criteria by which a Soldier is classified as a deserter have varied over time. Currently, any Soldier who has taken unauthorized leave from his/her training or duty station is considered AWOL. After 30 days, this status is officially changed to Dropped From Rolls (DFR), or desertion. This can be called the "administrative" definition of the term. From a legal standpoint, individuals are considered deserters when they have been convicted of the crime through a court martial. In reality, most desertion cases do not come to this. Instead, the overwhelming majority of Soldiers who desert are released from the Army with less-than-honorable discharges.

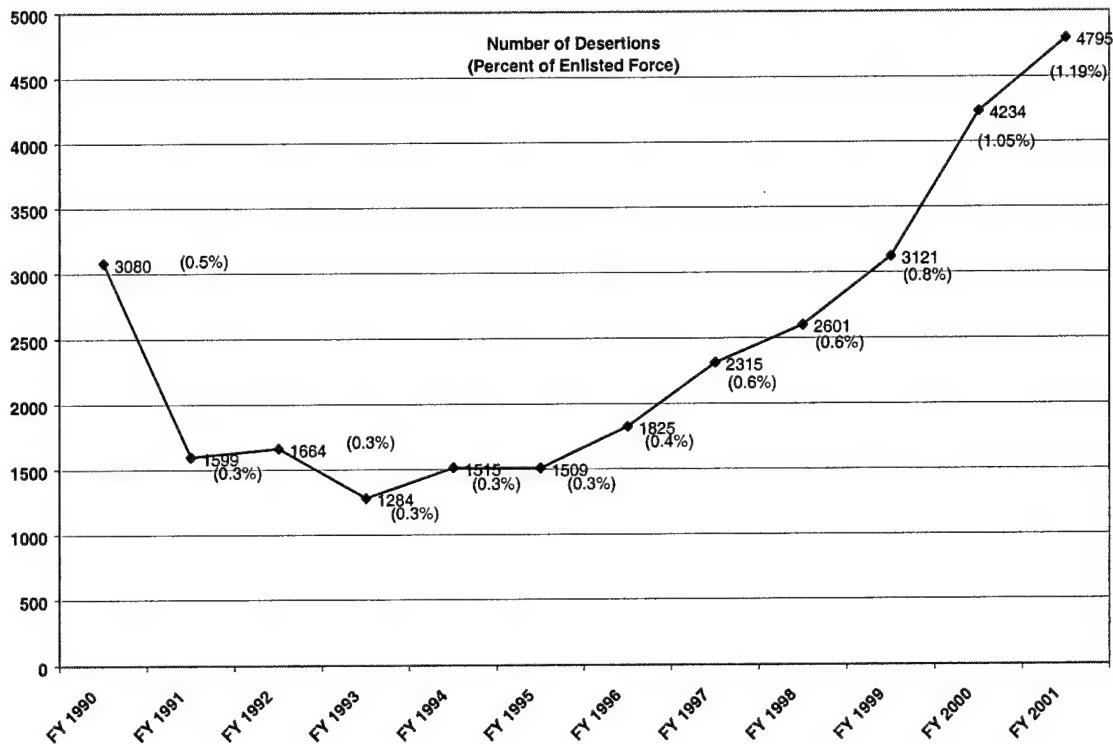
When a Soldier is reported missing, an inquiry is undertaken to attempt to ascertain his/her location and the possible reasons for the absence. At the same time, relevant personnel (e.g., the Provost Marshall) are notified of the absence and necessary reports are filed. Next of kin are informed that the Soldier is missing within specified time frames. After 30 consecutive days of absence, the Soldier is classified as DFR. Necessary forms are completed (e.g., DA Form 4187, DD Form 553, DD Form 458) and assembled in a deserter packet that is forwarded to the Personnel Control Center at Fort Knox, KY.

A Soldier is considered Returned to Military Control (RMC) when he/she surrenders to military authorities, is delivered to authorities, is detained by civilian law enforcement personnel, is found to be in a civilian medical facility in such condition that he/she cannot be returned to military authorities, or has entered another branch of the United States military. Absentees under civilian control are returned to military authorities as soon as possible. Soldiers who took absence from a training unit are returned to the Personnel Control Facility (PCF) at Fort Knox, KY or Fort Sill, OK. Those who have left operational units are returned to the unit from which they took absence. Soldiers in transit are considered to be assigned to the gaining unit, and so are returned to that unit.

Upon RMC, the unit commander interviews the Soldier to determine the cause of the absence and what can be done to mitigate those circumstances. This information is

also used to classify the leave as authorized/unauthorized and to determine the proper resolution to the case. This can include release or repatriation to the unit.

As seen in Figure 1, as of FY 2001 the number of desertions had been steadily increasing over the preceding 6 years (DAPE, 2002). It should be noted that, as a percentage of the overall enlisted Army force, these figures are still quite small, ranging from about 3/10 to 8/10 of a percent. By contrast, over the years 1968-1971, during the Vietnam War, the number of deserters as a percentage of the enlisted Army force averaged around 5% (Bell, 1979). However, with the number of desertions reaching nearly 5,000 in FY 2001 and apparently continuing to increase, this is a problem that cannot be ignored.



**Figure 1. Number of Army Enlisted Desertions by Fiscal Year, 1990-2001**

The survey described in this report was conducted to obtain input from Soldiers who were AWOL on such subjects as what led them to take this step and what, if anything, could have been done to prevent it. A second survey of supervisors was also initiated. This requested information about specific cases of desertion with which the respondent was familiar, as well as overall opinions concerning how desertion should be handled by the Army. This survey was completed by a sample of drill sergeants at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

## Method

### Survey Development

*Returning Soldiers Questionnaire (RSQ).* The first step in the development of the survey instrument was to identify the general areas of interest to Army leadership regarding desertion. Existing surveys were then culled for items that address those topics. New questions were developed to fill the voids left following this process. The draft instrument was reviewed by Army G-1 staff, ARI personnel, as well as the Army Personnel Survey Office. Suggested and required changes were implemented before the final instrument was printed in machine-readable format. The resulting 34-item *RSQ* was divided into three sections:

- I. Reasons for enlisting, in which respondents were asked to select from a list of 20 motivations for enlisting in the Army the ones that applied to them, and then indicate the three most important factors that led to their decision to join.
- II. Unauthorized leave. This section included 22 items covering all aspects of going AWOL including length of time served prior to leaving, steps taken to resolve issues that caused the respondent to leave, the reason(s) he/she left (both in closed- and open-ended response formats), actions that may have prevented the departure, how long the Soldier was gone, where he or she went while AWOL, whether he or she returned voluntarily and, if so, why.
- III. Background. This section included eight items covering gender, age and marital status at the time of departure, education, need for moral waiver for entry into the Army, MOS (Combat, Combat Support, Combat Service Support), rank, and whether the respondent was subject to disciplinary actions while in service.

The original study plan called for obtaining identifying information from survey respondents. The hope was that by fielding the deserter and supervisor surveys more or less simultaneously we would obtain input from a sample of Soldiers and their supervisors that would provide a more complete picture of those cases. That is, we would capture the perspectives of both the Soldier and his/her supervisor regarding the circumstances that led to the desertion and any steps taken to prevent it. For legal reasons involving protection of the deserter from self incrimination, the deserter survey was conducted in such a way as to maintain respondent anonymity. Thus, we were unable to directly compare the perspectives of the Soldier and his/her supervisor as we had hoped to be able to do.

*Survey of Supervisors of AWOL Soldiers.* As with the *RSQ*, project personnel worked with individuals from the office of the Army G-1 and ARI to develop a list of areas of interest for the supervisor survey. Where possible, existing items were used, including some from the *RSQ*. The final survey included three sections:

- I. Background information was collected, including rank, tenure, tenure as a supervisor, and the number of Soldiers currently under the respondent's command.
- II. Supervisors were instructed to "think about a specific Soldier who went AWOL or deserted from training." They were asked to select someone that they knew in their role as a supervisor and whom they knew well enough to have formed impressions of the individual. Supervisors who could not think of someone who fit these criteria were instructed to skip to section III. Respondents were then asked to provide the name of the person in question and answer a variety of questions about him/her (e.g., how long known, gender, how long AWOL). This was followed by items that asked for (a) assessments of the individual on a variety of dimensions (e.g., level of confidence), (b) the circumstances surrounding the AWOL (e.g., was anyone aware of Soldier's problems, was anything done to intervene), (c) what was the cause of the Soldier's departure, (d) what could have been done to prevent the absence, and (e) what the final outcomes of the case were.
- III. Eleven questions were included to assess supervisors' general attitudes regarding desertion and how it should be handled.

## Implementation

*RSQ.* As mentioned previously, Soldiers who go AWOL from training units are returned to the PCFs at Fort Knox and Fort Sill. Those who depart from operational units are generally returned to that unit. The original study plan called for survey administration to occur in both locations, with HumRRO personnel overseeing this process at the PCFs and Soldiers' supervisors being responsible for getting individuals to complete surveys when they were RMC to operational units. Because of the large troop deployments associated with the war in Iraq, the latter portion of the study was cancelled, so the focus of the initial data collection efforts was on the PCFs.

HumRRO personnel coordinated with points of contact at each of the PCFs to determine the most efficient and comprehensive means by which surveys could be administered to Soldiers upon their return. At both Fort Knox and Fort Sill, this translated into roughly weekly sessions in which newly-returned Soldiers were brought to a central location to complete the survey.

After assembling, the survey administrator explained the purpose of the research. Instructions for completing the instrument, which were printed within the survey itself, were read aloud by the administrator as respondents followed along. Emphasis was placed on the fact that responses were completely confidential. To reinforce this notion, the survey administrator circulated the room and allowed participants to randomly pick the questionnaire that they would complete. Once done, surveys were sealed in envelopes before being turned in. They were then stored in a secure location and forwarded in batches to the processing center at HumRRO headquarters.

*Supervisor Survey.* A point of contact was identified at Fort Knox to coordinate distribution of the supervisor surveys. Data were obtained on the number of drill sergeants in each training company at the site. Surveys were printed in machine-readable format and packages containing the appropriate number of questionnaires and envelopes in which completed surveys could be sealed were prepared. These were sent to Fort Knox, where an ARI representative briefed the coordinating officials on the purpose of the research. Two weeks were allowed for supervisors to complete and return surveys, which were then sent to the processing center.

## **Survey Processing**

As surveys were received, they were opened and hand checked to ensure they could be properly scanned (i.e., completed in pencil). In cases where the survey was completed in ink, the responses were gone over in pencil. Following scanning, an error report was produced that highlighted illegal multiple marks and cases with large amounts of missing data. These surveys were examined and the exact nature of the problem identified. In some instances, the respondent simply failed to answer a large number of items. Some cases were undetected ink, and these were completed again in pencil and rescanned. Although there were cases where multiple marks could be resolved based on answers given to other questions, for the most part these were set to missing.

Nine RSQ items included "other" responses with the instruction to write in the alternative answer. In addition, there were three completely open-ended questions asking Soldiers to state in their own words (a) what their reason was for leaving, (b) why they left as opposed to taking some other course of action, and (c) what could have been done to prevent them from going AWOL. These responses were entered into datafiles. Samples are also provided throughout the report to illuminate the findings.

Several supervisor items were also open-ended. Data for items concerning rank and tenure were hand-entered into the database. Content codes were developed for several items (e.g., "other" responses, why Soldier left), and these data were also entered into the database. Finally, supervisors were allowed to provide general written comments at the end of the survey. These were typed into a file and appear as Appendix C of this report.

## Results--Returning Soldiers Questionnaire

### Overview of Sample

Completed responses were received from 544 deserters. Of these, 429 were positively identified as having gone AWOL while still in training, and therefore were deemed eligible for this study. Figures 2-4 provide an overview of these individuals in terms of the background information collected through the survey. As might be expected, the vast majority of respondents were male (89%), which is slightly higher than the 85% male makeup of Army enlisted Soldiers (Department of Defense, 2002). Because these respondents were in training when they left, it is not surprising that the majority were also relatively young at that time, with over 50% being age 20 or below. It is noteworthy, however, that 14% of respondents were 26 years of age or greater at the time they went AWOL. The majority of RSQ respondents were involved in some sort of relationship (e.g., dating, engaged, or married) when they deserted, while 40% identified themselves as single and never married.

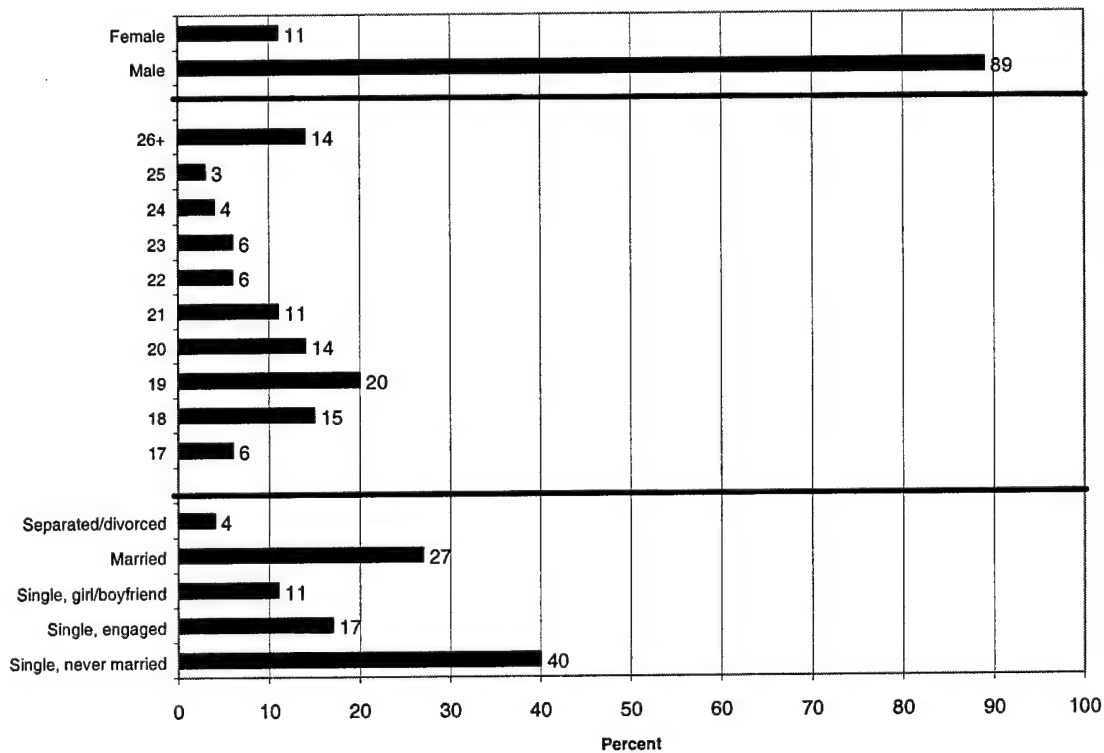
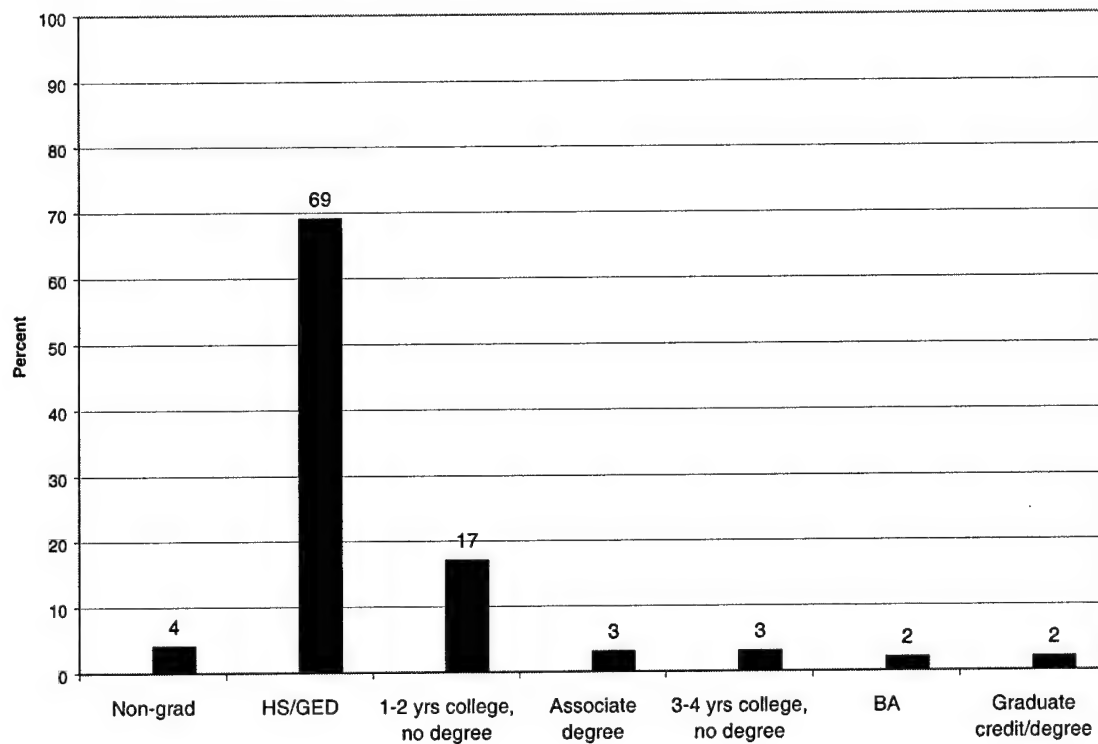


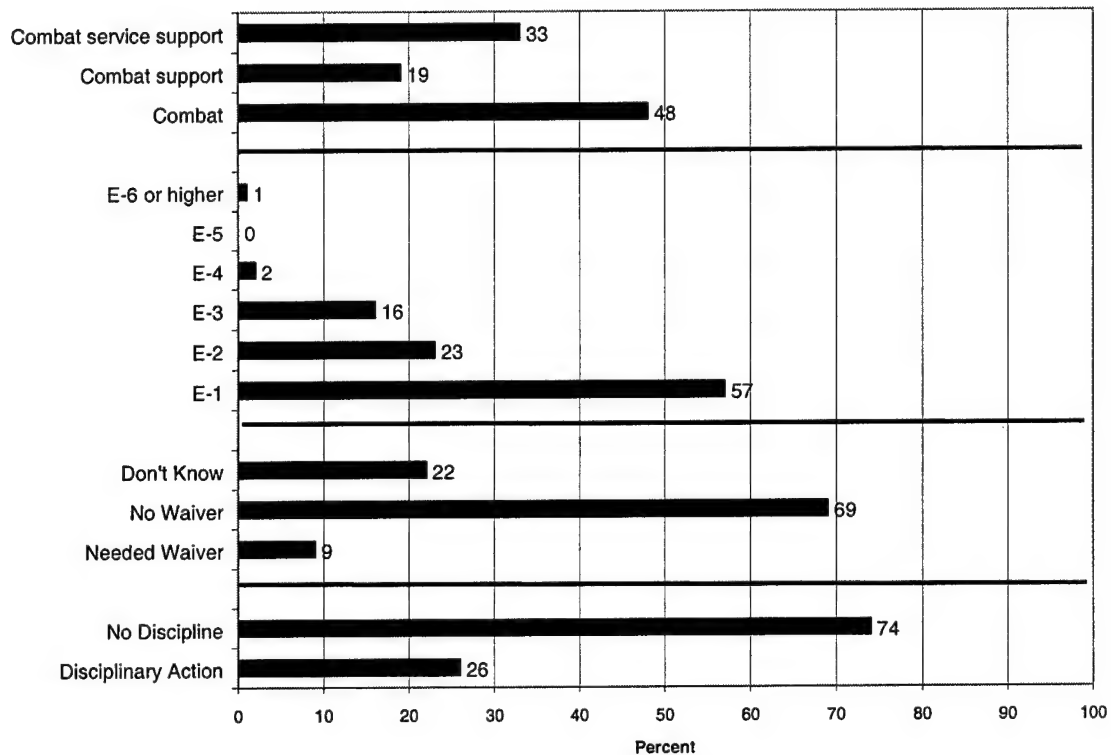
Figure 2. Gender, Age, and Marital Status of RSQ Respondents

Finally, although only 4% of respondents reported not having at least a high school diploma (Figure 3), this is higher than is true for the Army as a whole, where less than 1% of enlisted Soldiers fall into this category (Department of Defense, 2002).



**Figure 3. Educational Attainment of RSQ Respondents**

In regard to their Army experience, nearly half of RSQ respondents were in Combat Military Occupational Specialties (MOS), while one third were in Combat Service Support, and just under 20% in Combat Support (Figure 4). As might be expected, the majority of respondents were E-1s, with only a small portion (3%) having risen to grade E-4 or above. Nearly a quarter of the sample were unsure whether they required a moral waiver to enter the Army, while 9% indicated they did, and 69% said they did not. Finally, just over a quarter of respondents said they were subject to some kind of disciplinary action during their tenure in the Army.

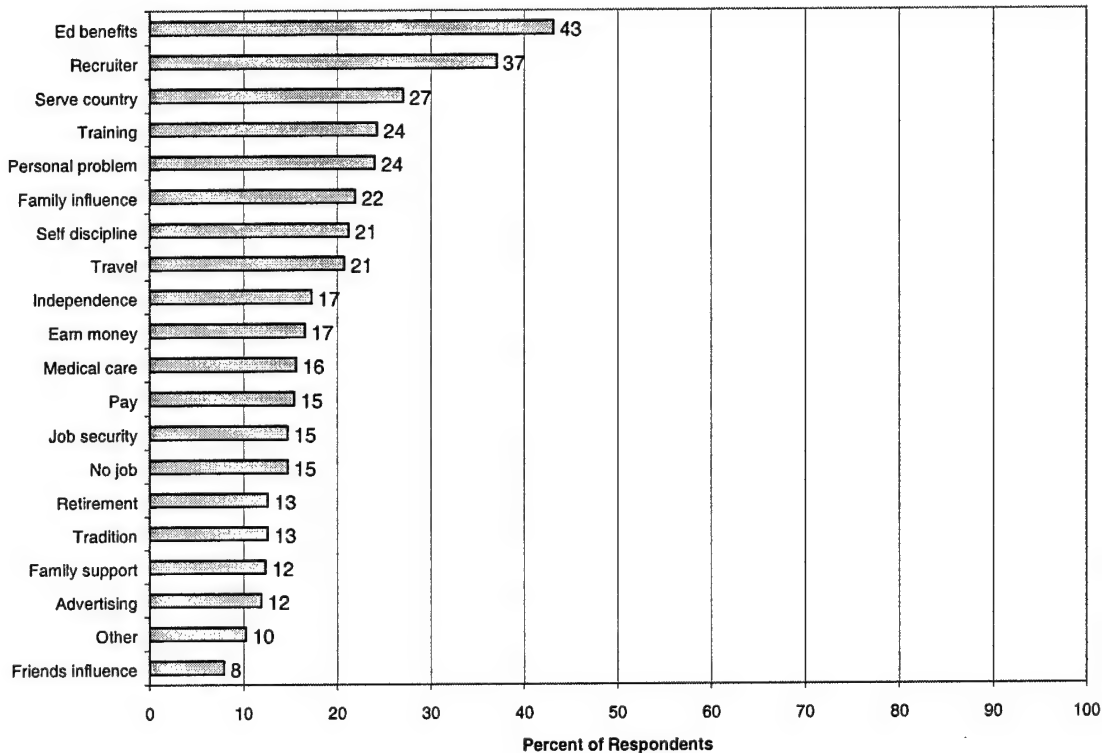


**Figure 4. MOS Category, Rank When AWOL, Waiver Status Upon Entry, and In-Service Disciplinary Actions of RSQ Respondents**



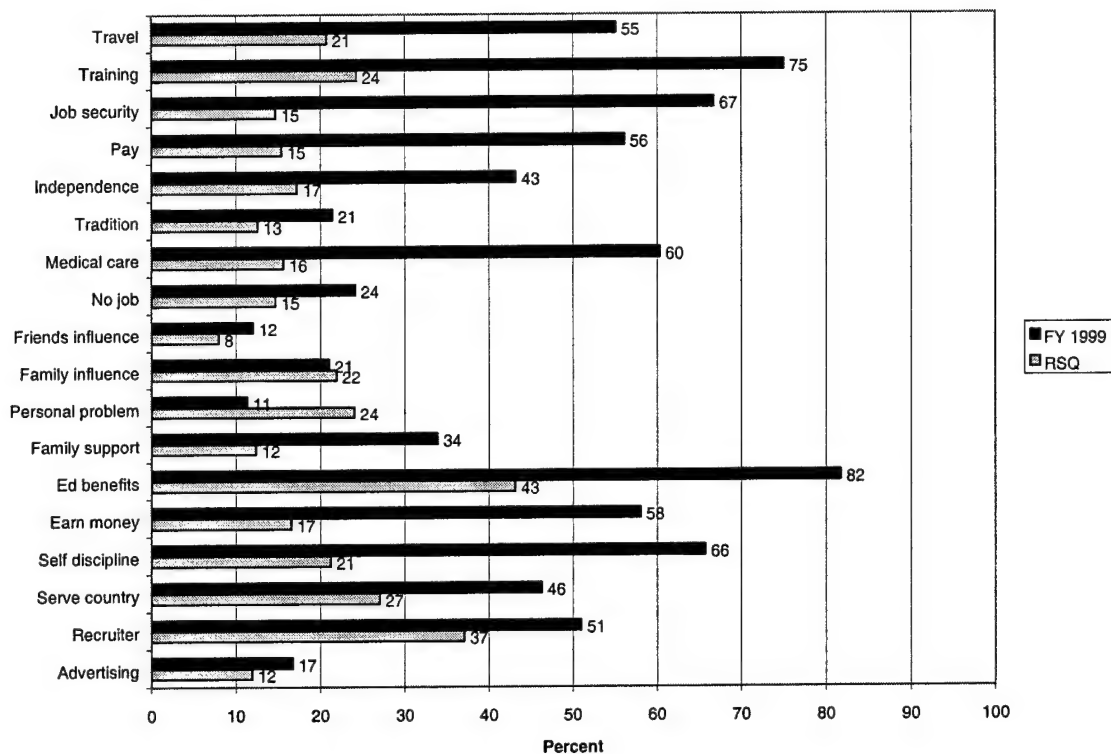
## Reasons for Enlisting

The first item in the RSQ asked respondents to select from a list of 20 reasons for enlisting in the Army all of those that applied to them. Figure 5 shows the percentage of respondents who endorsed each alternative. Educational benefits were the most frequently cited reason for enlisting (43% of respondents), followed by Army recruiter influence (37%), and service to country (27%). None of the other options was endorsed by more than a quarter of the sample.



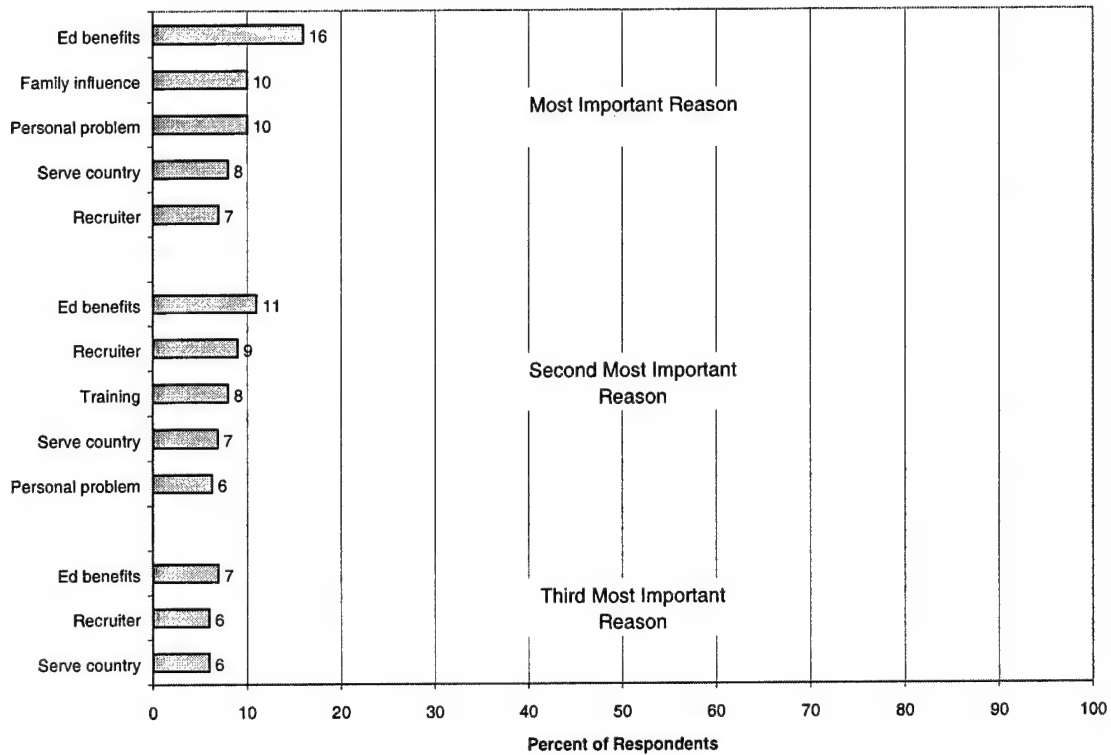
**Figure 5. Percent of RSQ Respondents Endorsing Reasons for Enlisting**

The most recent comparable data come from a study of Soldiers who enlisted during FY 1999 (Strickland, 2004). A variety of questionnaires were administered as part of this research program, including one given to Soldiers in their reception battalions in which they were asked to indicate how important a variety of factors were in their decision to enlist in the Army. Figure 6 shows the percentage of Soldiers in the FY 1999 study who deemed each of the factors as very or extremely important to them, as well as the percent of the RSQ sample that endorsed each reason. Keeping in mind the differences between these groups (i.e., one newly entered, the other having served and left), the results are nonetheless of some interest. The only reason selected by a substantially higher portion of the deserter sample was to “get away from a personal problem” (24% of deserters, 11% of the 1999 cohort sample).



**Figure 6. Percent Endorsing Reasons for Enlisting, RSQ and FY 1999 Cohort Soldiers**

Finally, Figure 7 presents the reasons that were endorsed as being of first, second, and third most importance in the decision to enlist by more than 5% of RSQ respondents. In each case, educational benefits was selected as the reason by the largest percentage of respondents, with Army recruiter and serving the country also receiving more than 5% of the endorsements.



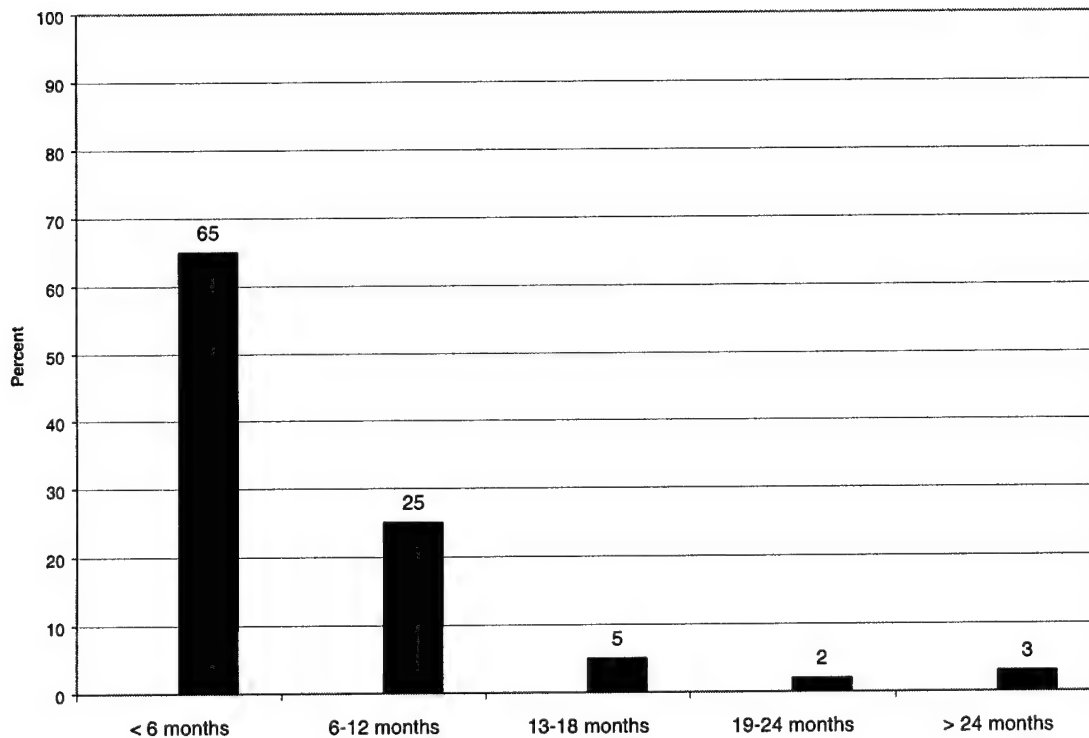
**Figure 7. Reasons for Enlisting Selected as First, Second, and Third Most Important by Five Percent or More of RSQ Respondents**

The remainder of this section of the report is organized around the following topics:

- Circumstances prior to going AWOL
- Plans and actions after going AWOL
- Reasons for going AWOL
- Potential alternatives to going AWOL
- Returning to the Army
- The future
- Open-ended comments

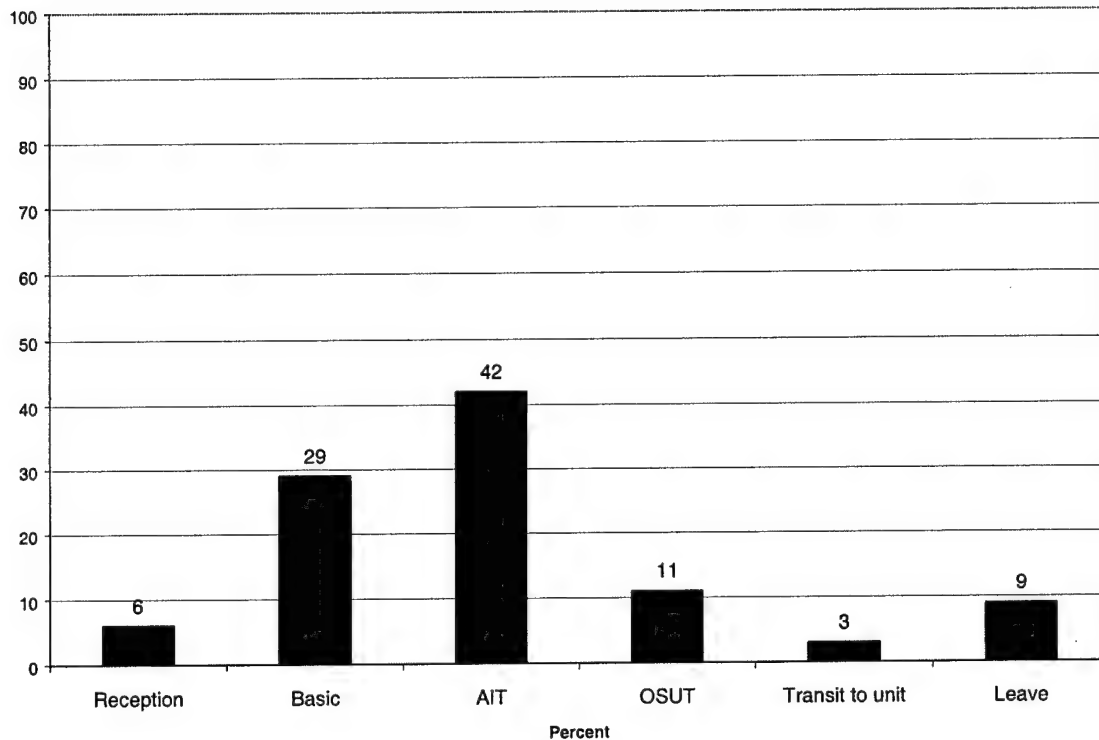
## Circumstances Prior to Going AWOL

Respondents were asked several questions about their circumstances prior to making the decision to take unauthorized leave. The first of these concerned their length of service. The exact question was, "How long have you been/were you in the Army?" Given that the vast majority of respondents were only recently returned to military control, these data predominantly reflect length of service prior to going AWOL. As seen in Figure 8, nearly two-thirds had served 6 months or less, and 90% were in the Army for less than a year.



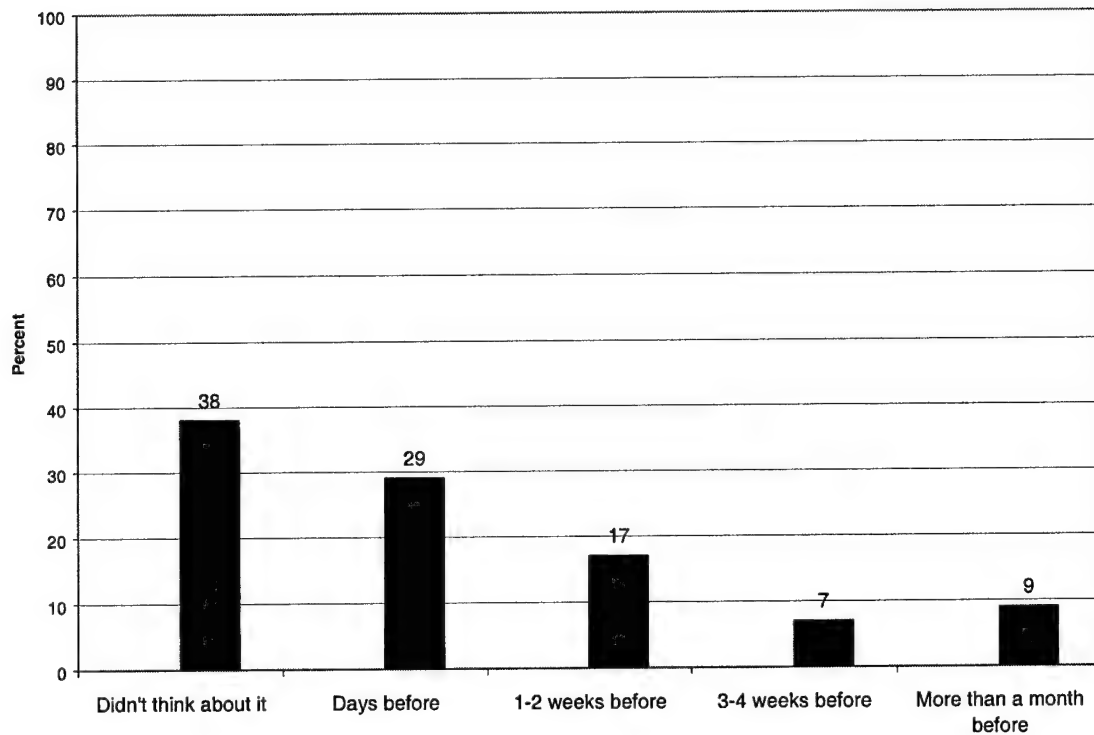
**Figure 8. Length of Army Service of RSQ Respondents**

As seen in Figure 9, 42% of respondents had reached Advanced Individual Training (AIT) before taking unauthorized leave. This suggests that nearly half of these deserters had achieved some success in the Army before going AWOL.



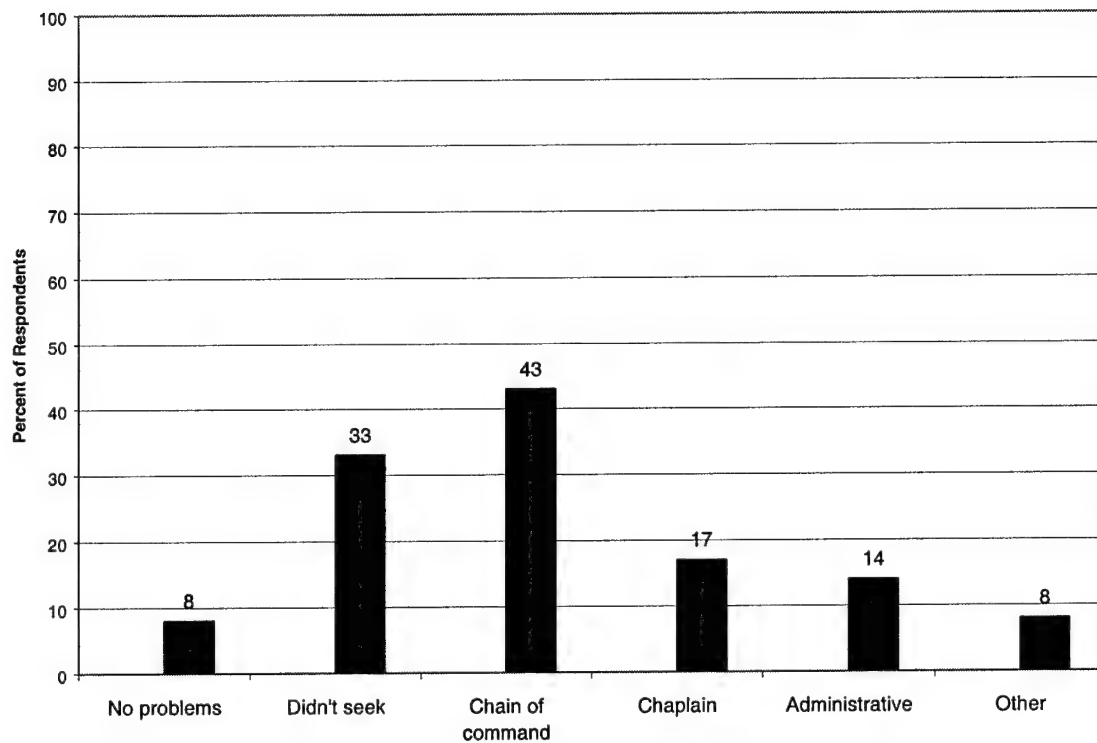
**Figure 9. Location From Which Respondents Took Unauthorized Leave**

These Soldiers were also asked to indicate when they started thinking about taking unauthorized leave. As seen in Figure 10, the preponderance stated that they didn't think about it in advance, while over one quarter only considered this action some days before going AWOL.



**Figure 10. When Respondents Began Thinking About Going AWOL**

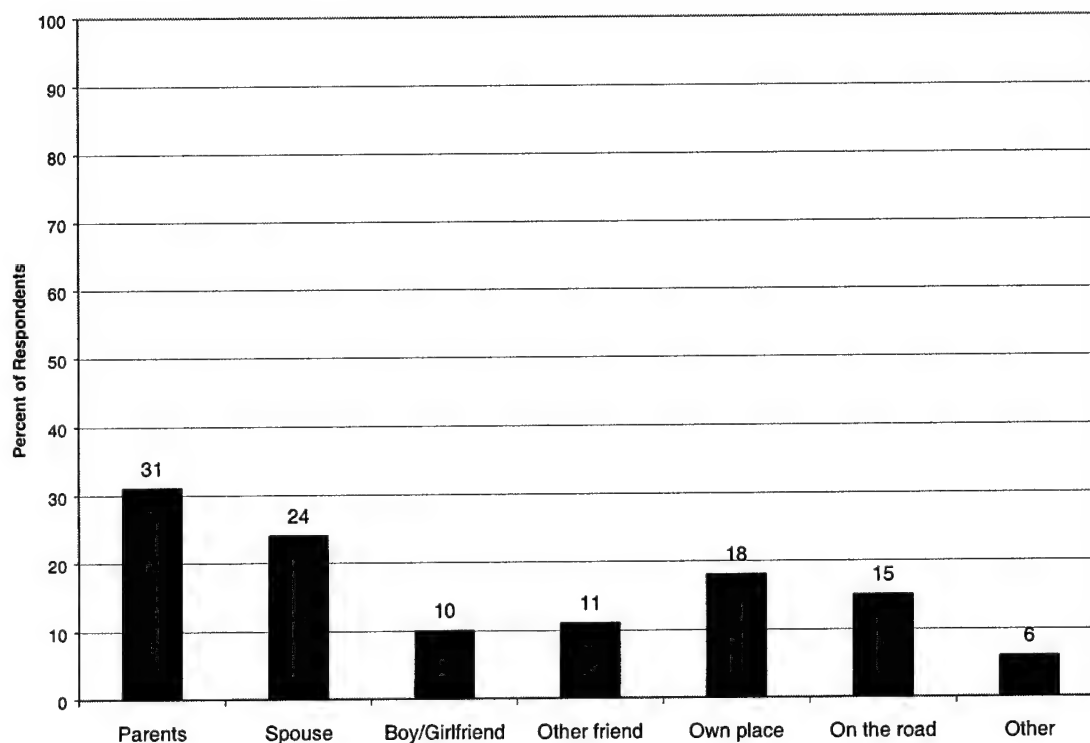
Finally, respondents were asked if they sought assistance with any problems they were having before going AWOL. As seen in Figure 11, 43% of these deserters said they sought assistance from their chain of command, while one-third made no attempt to get help. The “other” responses in this instance included medical personnel, Congressional representatives, the Red Cross, and family members.



**Figure 11. Sources of Assistance Used Prior to Going AWOL**

## Plans and Actions After Going AWOL

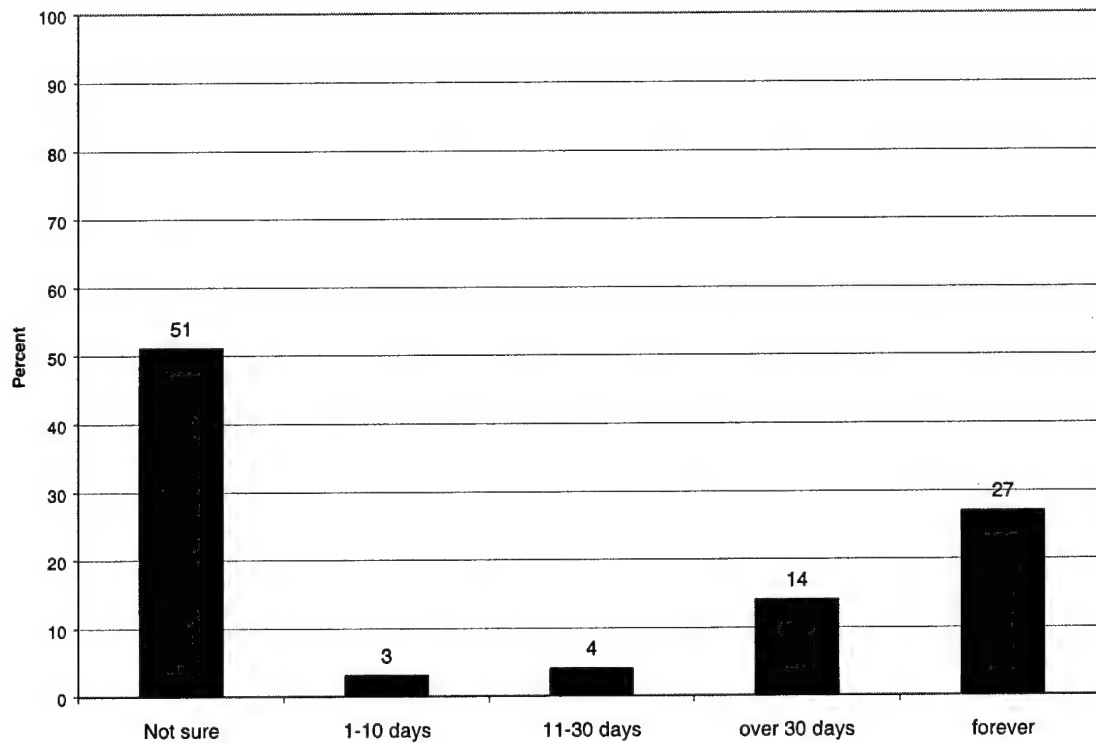
RSQ respondents were asked where they went after they left the Army, how long they planned on being gone, and how long they actually were gone. As seen in Figure 12, the majority of these deserters went to the residence of their parents or their spouse. The “other” responses in this case included other relatives, to see children, and to a job.



**Figure 12. Where RSQ Respondents Went After Going AWOL**

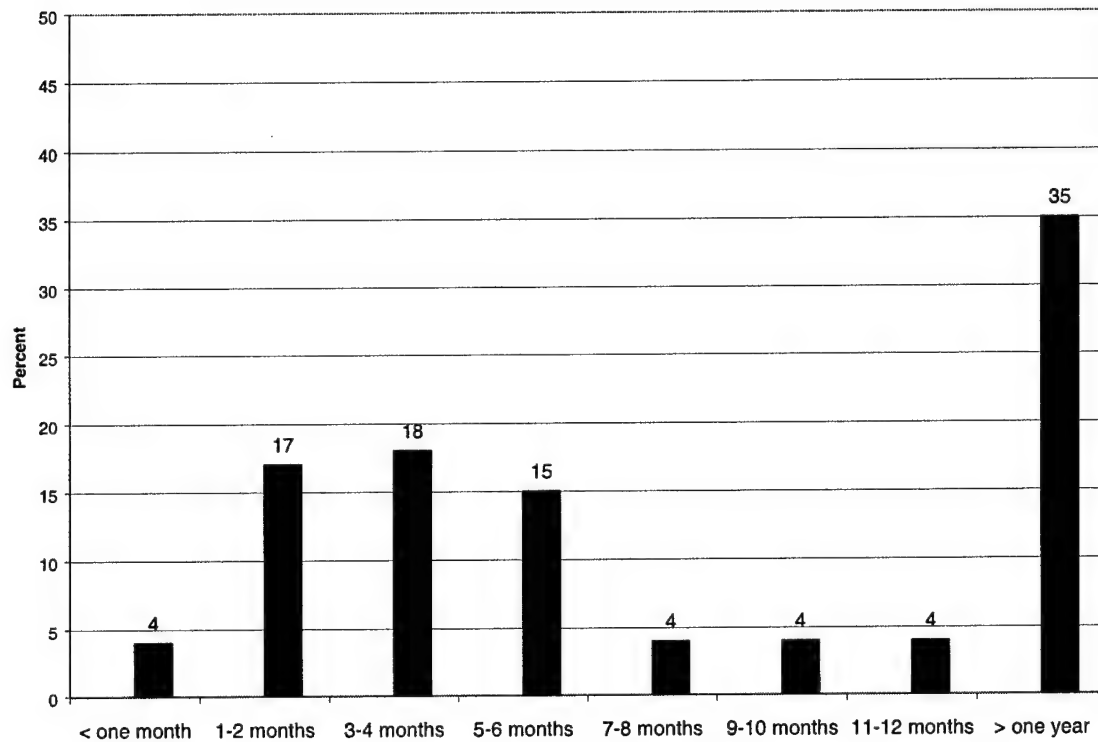


When asked how long they intended to stay away from the Army, the majority of respondents indicated they were not sure (Figure 13). Just over one-quarter stated that they did not intend to come back at all. This suggests that in the majority of cases this was not considered an irrevocable decision at the time of departure. That is, at least some of these respondents left with the idea that they could return when the problems that drove them to this action were resolved.



**Figure 13. Planned Length of Absence Upon Going AWOL**

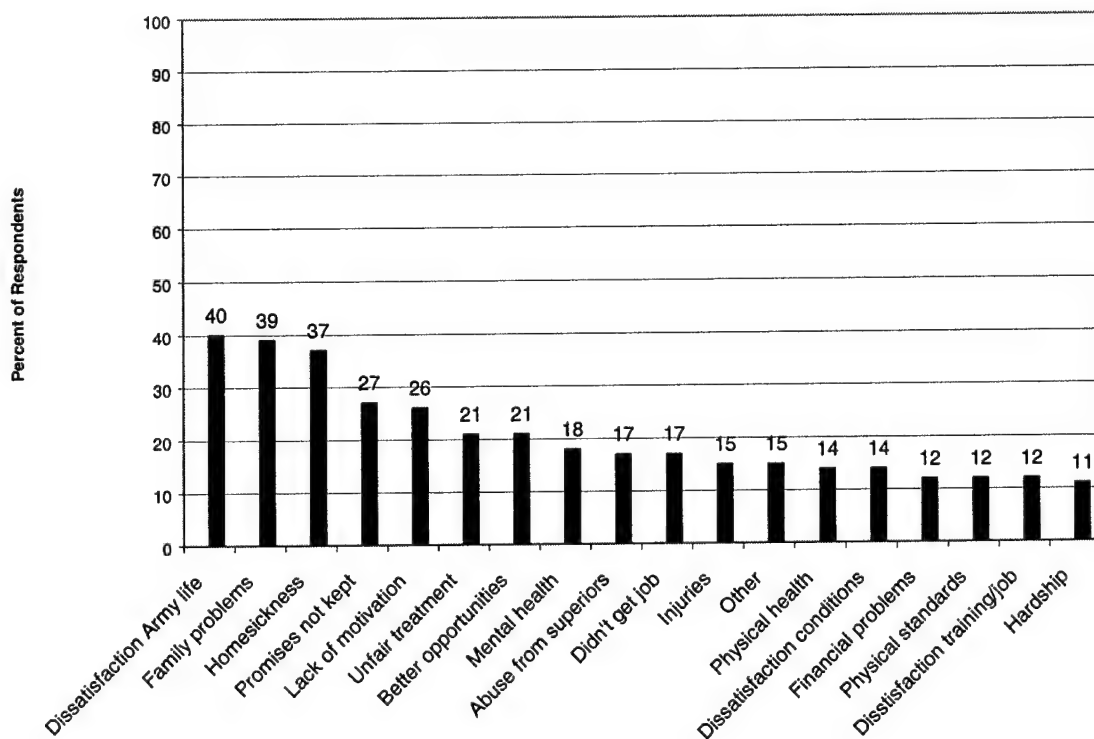
When asked how long they had actually been away from the Army, the largest proportion of respondents (35%) said more than one year (see Figure 14). However, the majority of these deserters were gone 6 months or less.



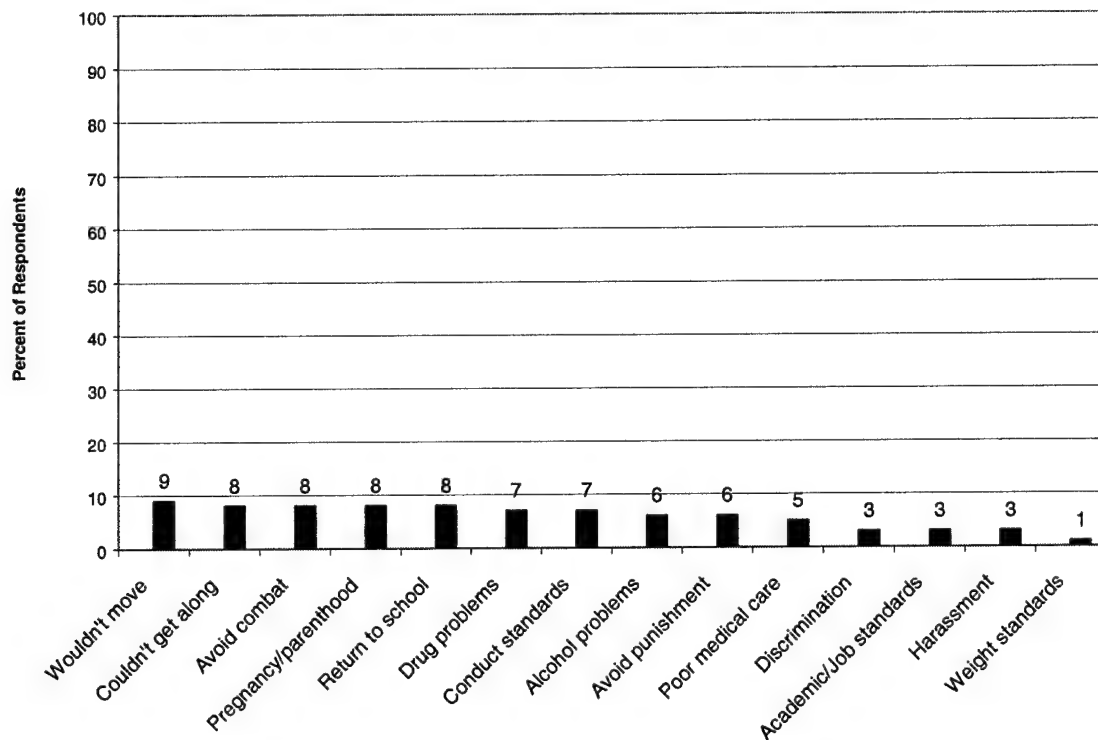
**Figure 14. Length of Time Soldiers Were AWOL**

## Reasons for Going AWOL

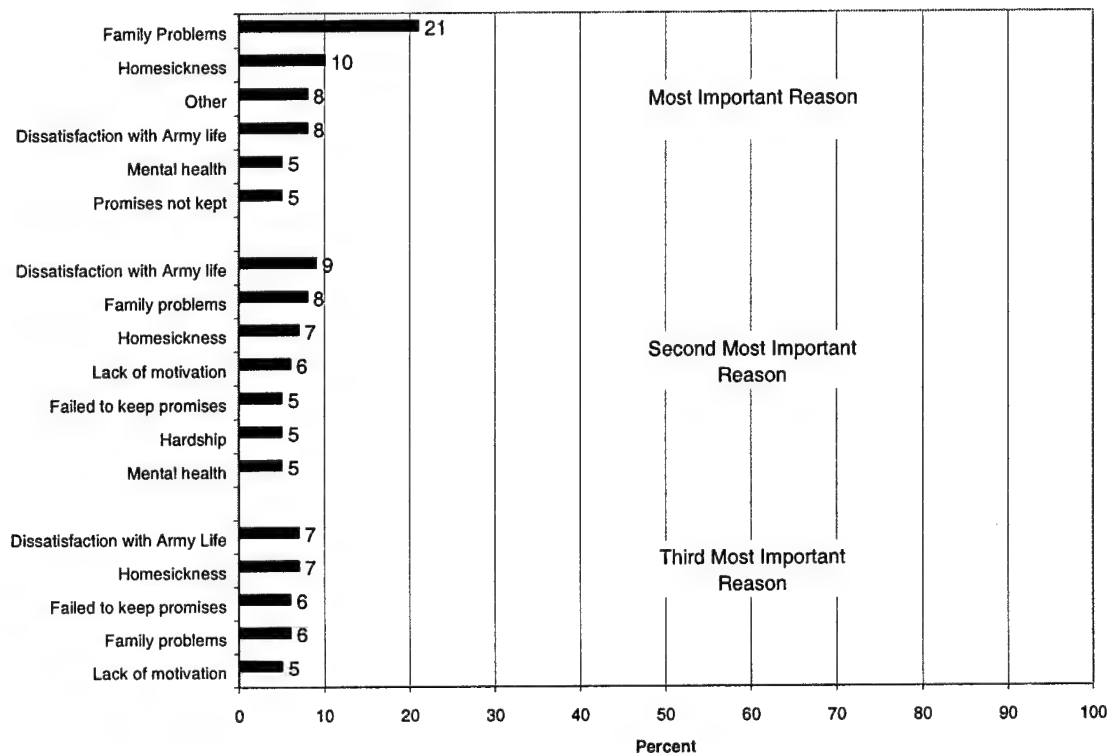
RSQ respondents were asked to review a list of 32 factors that can cause Soldiers to leave the Army, and then to mark each that applied in their particular case. They were then directed to indicate which of the reasons selected was first, second, and third in importance in motivating them to leave. Two follow-up questions asked them to state in their own words why they left, and why they left instead of taking some other course of action. Figures 15 and 16 summarize the responses given when respondents were to choose as many reasons for leaving from the list as applied to them. Figure 17 presents the reasons cited by more than five percent of respondents as being their first, second, and third most important. Both sets of results clearly suggest that family problems and dissatisfaction with Army life were primary motivators for leaving the Army, along with homesickness, lack of motivation, and the perception that promises made (by the Army, recruiters) were not kept.



**Figure 15. Reasons Soldiers Went AWOL**



**Figure 16. Reasons Soldiers Went AWOL**



**Figure 17. Reasons for Going AWOL Selected as First, Second, and Third Most Important by More than Five Percent of RSQ Respondents**

To illuminate these findings, we include a sample of the written responses that coincide with each of the reasons cited for going AWOL by more than 15% of the sample.

*Dissatisfaction with Army Life—Selected by 40% of respondents*

I was basically better off outside the Army

Hated Army life, told a girl I was going to kill her in her sleep, took a bottle of Tylenol. Went through chain of command and said there wasn't any way I could leave the Army.

Couldn't adjust to the life of mass punishment every time someone messed up. I didn't get into trouble even once but ended up suffering mass punishments. Found it hard to relate with 17- and 18-year olds that make the bulk of Army recruits. My recruitment and signing up took a record 3 days making me feel rushed, taken advantage of and locked into a contract I could not change.

I just couldn't cope emotionally with Army life. Couldn't concentrate - confused.

I came to the conclusion that I hate the Army. For months I told my chain of command and requested a discharge. They did nothing for me. I left.

*Family/Marital Problems—Selected by 39% of respondents*

My ex girlfriend would not let me see my son unless I came home right away.

Wife is manic-depressive, was in hospital, got a Red Cross message, went up my chain of command, was told only to call my wife not to go see her. Red Cross was going to take kids into childrens services.

My dad died when I came back after he died I couldn't take it, I went AWOL. I was going to come back then my wife had lost the baby she was carrying.

Parents broke up left to see if I could fix it.

There was sickness within the family that caused financial hardship as well as other hardships. I was going through marital problems while away at training at the same time of having family members battling cancer.

*Homesickness—Selected by 37% of respondents*

I thought I could do it, because I was in good shape and was captain of my wrestling team in HS. I could have easily done the workouts but I just couldn't do it mentally. I was depressed and missed my mom and my dog so much.

I was homesick and was getting really depressed

(personal) I let my homesickness overcome me and I didn't get to converse with my girlfriend (fiance) enough I just let it all overwhelm me.

My wife and I found we couldn't take the time apart.

*Army failed to keep promises made—Selected by 27% of respondents*

I was told by my recruiter that I could go home on 30 days leave after BCT and when I was told that I would be shipping to AIT I acted impulsively and left.

I went AWOL because the Army are liars because on MEPS they offer me MOS administration when they sent me to Ft. Sill, OK on processing days they told me that I didn't have an MOS. That's why I went AWOL! I was desperate in how to do it.

I just didn't get the job I desired

*Lack of Motivation—Selected by 26% of respondents*

My fiancé became homeless and the Army would not let me go home to help. I lost all concentration, motivation and will to go on in my Army career.

I was homesick and my mom and girlfriend came up it made it hard and my motivation was lacking.

I had no motivation any more for the Army. Everything went down hill after I failed out of school. I tried to keep positive but they kept losing my paper work and they could not help me emotionally to keep positive.

*Unfair Treatment—Selected by 21% of respondents*

False accusations and physical and mental abuse by Drill Sergeant. I was in restaurant management for almost 17 years. I have had all kinds of classes on how to treat people. And getting here, and seeing some of

the things I saw, "Drill Sarg. Not letting a man use the bathroom. Man pissing down his leg." We are human. It's OK to treat us like we are human. I didn't want any part in treating people this way.

My company commander only punished me when there were numerous people who had earrings in off post. My DG position passes, and freedom was taken away from me and ONLY me. You work so hard to build yourself up, and ONE ##### thing throws you down to the bottom.

I get kicked out of Airborne school 4 days before graduating for underage drinking. I didn't get caught (someone snitched). I was supposed to get married in North Carolina, but since I got kicked out, they wanted me to go to Korea where I can't take my fiancé and get married. Someone got caught drinking 2 days before me, didn't make it to formation, slept in the wrong building and didn't get kicked out, and they took my bonus.

*Better Opportunities Outside the Army—Selected by 21% of respondents*

Did not feel life in the Army was for me. Had better opportunity for education outside.

I never wanted to join, but my mother was in financial need. My brother's business took off, and I lost all reason for complying.

*Mental Health Problems—Selected by 18% of respondents*

I was having some mental health problems. I was hearing voices and I told my drill sergeant in AIT and he did nothing to help me and I told the other D.S. and they kept pushing the issue away.

I was depressed about my family life, abusing drugs and alcohol, and some of my superiors didn't understand this and made my stay hell. I thought leaving was my best option.

I was going through mental stress and I was having a lot of fears, scared I was becoming a person I didn't like, also I had a thought of suicide.

I was hospitalized for bipolar disorder during AIT. In which they told me I would be discharged for. My patience and sanity ran thin so I just left.

*Abuse From Superiors—Selected by 17% of respondents*

Well the superior drill sergeant put his hands on me more than once.

My DS at Fort Eustis had been verbally abusing me for some time and the day I left he spit on me and I lost it. 1BN 222A Regt.

*Didn't Get Desired Job (MOS)—Selected by 17% of respondents*

The first was recruiter lied to me about my MOS. Didn't tell everything. Then the job of taking out mines of my MOS. Then the other is girlfriend type. Can't stand living in the woods.

They wouldn't give me the MOS I was trained for already, so I wasn't gonna put up with that so I left. If I'm in the military I want to do a job I will enjoy, not a job they tell me I have to do.

I tried to change MOS then I tried to get out and both were denied.

*Injuries—Selected by 15% of respondents*

I have a bunion on my leg it bleeds when I run or gets real sore when I'm on it too long. I wanted medical discharge but they told me "drink water and drive on."

Stress fractures in both feet from a road march. No adequate medical attention. Did not want to be held back in training.

I was injured in training and sent to PTRP in Ft. Knox where I was denied any type of discharge (medical to conscientious objector) and was not returning back to training for several months.

*Other—Selected by 15% of Respondents*

I have to children. I am a single mother, I did not know what would happen to my kids if I got killed or hurt to the point in which I could not take care of them.

I was looking for something different and this just wasn't it.

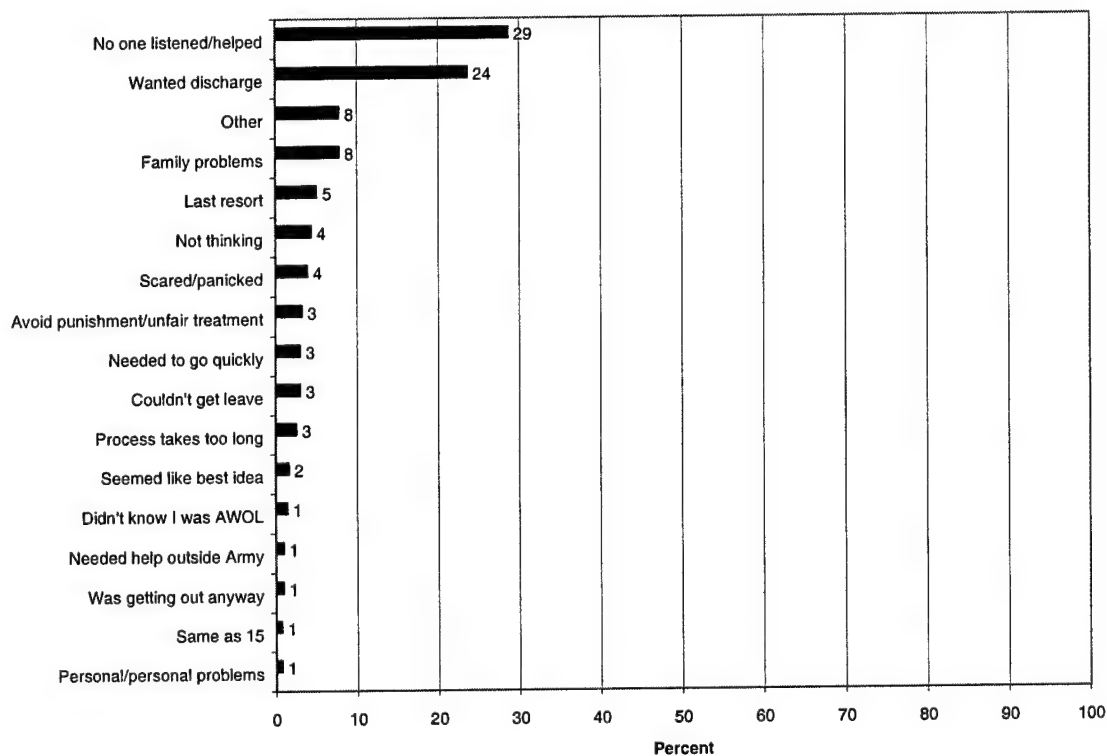
I didn't want to be here.



After providing written input as to why they went AWOL, RSQ respondents were asked the following question:

*Given the circumstance(s) you described in [the previous question], what made you go AWOL instead of taking some other action (e.g., get help, find another solution)? Describe what you were thinking as best you can.*

Content analysis was performed on the responses to this question by first reading a sample of the answers to develop a set of comprehensive codes. These were then applied to the full set of responses, with adjustments to the coding scheme carried out as needed. Figure 18 shows the results of this process.



**Figure 18. Content Analysis Results, Why Respondents Chose AWOL Over Other Options**

The preponderance of respondents indicated that they attempted to seek help, but were not listened to or failed to obtain the assistance needed. The following are examples of the responses that fell into this category.

I did try other avenues. Chaplin, Drill Sgt. No one seemed to care. I needed to be around people that really cared and loved me.

I tried the chain of command. They didn't want to listen.

I tried getting help. The Army worked against, not with me. Maybe if the Army was concerned about my best interests I would have not gone AWOL.

I tried to talk to the drill sgts and every time they didn't want to hear it or they didn't have time so I never got anywhere.

The superiors refused to listen to my problem. Also, they told me "they" went through the same problems.

Nearly one quarter of the respondents who answered this question indicated that they wanted to be discharged from the Army.

I wasn't aware that I could try and chapter out instead of going AWOL. Going AWOL was the quickest way to get out at the time.

Didn't want any more to do with it period.

It was my only way other than death to get out.

I had asked to leave in the reception battalion and I was told I could not get out of the Army. So what would be the point in doing something else. No one would of let me go.

Of those who provided answers 8% cited family problems or needs as being the reason for their choosing to go AWOL as opposed to taking some other course of action.

I need to go home and make sure no one takes/splits family apart. The only think I have left is my family.

Family first.

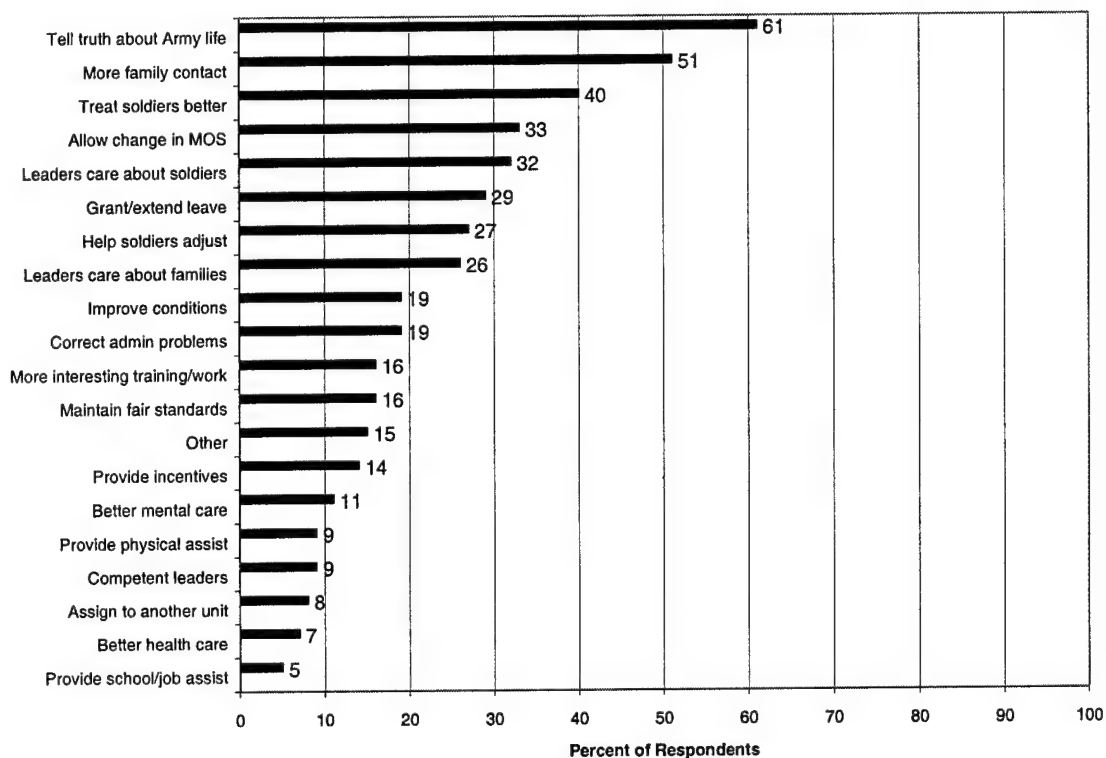
Taking care of my husband who just got out of the hospital and taking care of my son.

Most of the comments in the "other category," which was assigned to another 8% of those who responded to the item, were either unintelligible or stated "none," "does not apply," and so on. Fewer than 5% of those who answered this item provided comments in the remaining categories.

### **Potential Alternatives to Going AWOL**

After providing input on the circumstances that caused them to leave, RSQ respondents were asked to indicate what, if anything, could have been done to prevent them from taking this course of action. This was done in two ways: by selecting from a list of 20 potential interventions, and through an open-ended response format. Figure 19

shows the percentage of those who answered this question who selected each of the responses provided.



**Figure 19. Percent Indicating That Actions May Have Prevented AWOL**

More than half of those who answered this item indicated that being told the truth about Army life may have prevented them from going AWOL. In many cases, however, this seems to mean that the individual would not have enlisted to begin with.

Tell the recruits to tell us the whole truth about Army life, and allow us to change our MOS.

Stop allowing your recruiters to lie.

Done what the recruiters told me was going to be done.

Just over 50% of those who provided an answer to this question indicated that more contact with their families may have prevented them from deserting.

Being able to use the phone more often so we can talk to family more often.

More phone calls but I'm not even sure if that would have helped my situation.

More contact with family. If I would have got to basic quicker.

Approximately 40% of respondents suggested that better treatment of Soldiers might have made a difference.

If Soldiers were treated like Soldiers and not like dogs.

Allowing us to smoke in rehab and not mentally abusing us.

A little bit of care. They only care about the contract you signed.

One third of respondents suggested that a change in MOS might have made a difference in their decision to go AWOL.

Maybe letting me change MOS so I can get around a different type of person.

Could give me the MOS I wanted and told me the truth about everything.

A re-classification to a different MOS, and not going to Korea.

In a similar vein, 32% of those who answered this question suggested that if leaders cared more about Soldiers the situation may have been different.

If I could have accessed my chain of command without fear of punishment.

I think I would not have gone if any of the DS would have listened to me.

Chain of command to listen and work with Soldier.

Granting a request for leave time, or extending leave already granted, was cited by 29% of respondents as possibly making a difference in their decision to leave.

30-day absent of leave would have (maybe) let me deal with the situation better at home instead of away.

Emergency leave, more communication with Commander, who has the authority to grant such action, person to person contact.

If they would have given me leave while she had surgery and her recovery I wouldn't have had to go AWOL.

Just over one quarter of respondents felt that, if leadership cared more about their families, they may have taken another course of action.

They could have acted like they cared about my family.

Cared more about the well-being of my family.

I could have been allowed to get my daughter. I could have been allowed time to find somewhere safe for her. My problem could have been taken seriously.

Finally, 27% of those responding to this item highlighted assistance in adjusting to the Army as something that may have helped them to avoid going AWOL.

To have let me talk to someone like the chaplain or someone.

The only thing that should have been done was on my part. I should've found someone to talk to before I went AWOL.

I failed the 1 mile run at the reception twice, they should have put me through the FTU so my knees wouldn't shatter from me being big.

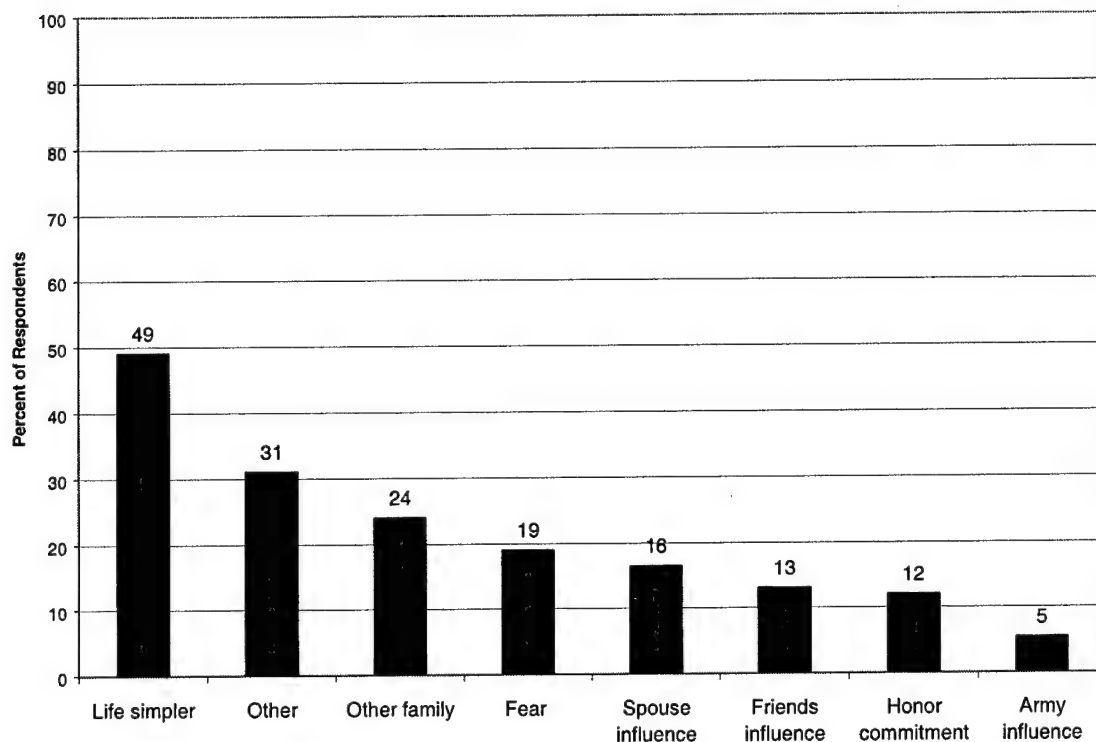
The remaining choices were endorsed by fewer than 20% of the respondents answering the question. Sample quotations related to each response are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Actions That Might Have Prevented AWOL and Representative Written Comments**

Action	Percent Endorsing	Sample Written Comment
Improve conditions	19	Change in MOS, better living environment, and giving back everything that was taken from me.
Correct administrative problems	19	Process pay change requests faster.
More interesting work	16	If they could have kept me out from behind the desk.
Maintain fair standards	16	The fair treatment to the Soldiers I was with.
Other	15	Nothing, really.
Provide incentives	14	Let me change my MOS or give more incentives for accomplishments
Better mental care	11	Rehabilitation. Someone to tell me I needed help bad.
Competent leaders	9	Nothing. I don't mind the military, I just don't approve of the people in charge of it (leaders).
Provide physical assistance	9	Medically discharge me or have longer con leave
Assign to another unit	8	If I could have signed in to another unit.
Better health care	7	If I didn't get hurt or they fixed my wrist the first time instead of messing it up.

### **Returning to the Army**

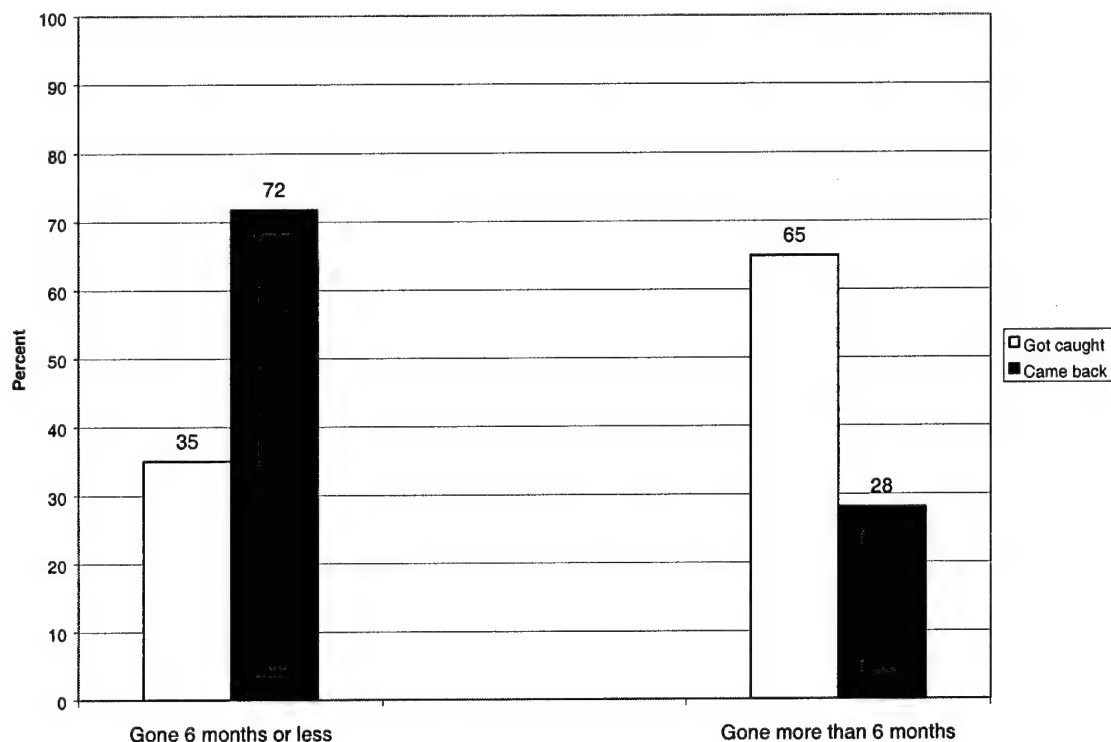
Respondents were split 50-50 in regard to whether they returned from AWOL after being caught by authorities or returned voluntarily. Among those who came back on their own, nearly half indicated that "returning made my life simpler" was one factor that influenced this decision (Figure 20). The influence of family members other than spouses and fear of getting caught were cited by approximately one quarter of the voluntary returnees.



**Figure 20. Factors That Influenced RSQ Respondents to Return to the Army Voluntarily**

Among those who selected “other” in response to this question, the preponderance of written responses addressed the need to resolve the situation and/or to obtain a discharge.

As mentioned previously, the majority of these deserters had been gone less than one year, while 35% were absent for over a year. One striking although perhaps not surprising relationship is demonstrated in Figure 21. While nearly three quarters of those who were absent 6 months or less reported that they returned voluntarily, about two thirds of those gone longer than 6 months said they were caught by the authorities. This strongly suggests that the greater the length of time away, the less likely it is that an individual will turn him/herself in.



**Figure 21. Length of Absence Without Leave by Manner in Which Returned**

### The Future

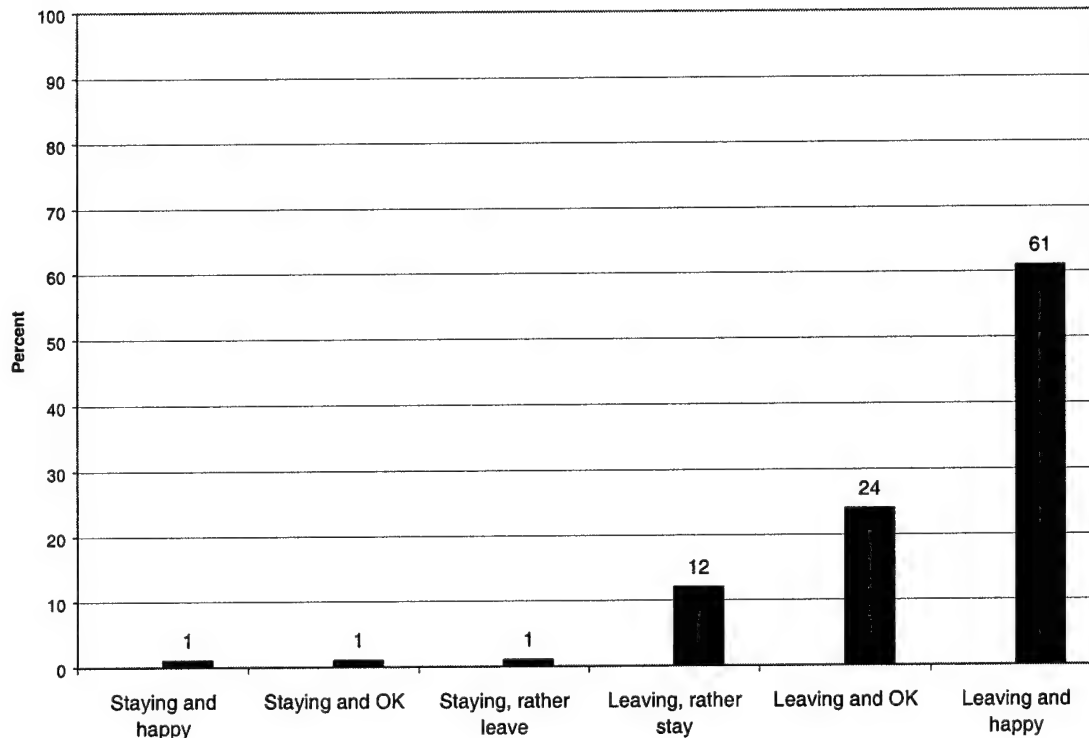
When asked what will be happening to them in the immediate future, 91% of those answering the question indicated they would be released from the Army, 3% said they would return to an Army unit, and 9% marked "other." (Respondents were allowed to mark multiple responses.) Among those who selected "other," most indicated that they did not know what the future holds, or mentioned some specific activity they would be engaged in upon return to civilian life. When asked the type of punishment to which they had been or will be subjected as a result of going AWOL, 70% of respondents indicated they were simply being discharged, 25% said they did not know, and 4% said no punishment was in the offing. Four respondents said they would receive company-level reprimand, while one individual indicated he/she would receive a court martial.

Finally, RSQ respondents were asked to indicate which of a series of statements best described their feelings about the Army at the time they completed the survey:

- I am remaining in the Army and I'm happy about it.
- I am remaining in the Army and I feel OK about it.
- I am remaining in the Army but I'd rather not be.
- I am being discharged but would prefer to remain in the Army.
- I am being discharged and I feel OK about it.
- I am being discharged and I'm happy about it.



These results are shown in Figure 22. The majority of respondents (60%) indicated that they were leaving the Army and were happy about that. Approximately one quarter were also leaving, but were somewhat less sanguine about this outcome. Only 12% (48 respondents) said they were being discharged but would rather remain. The remaining were evenly split between staying and happy (4), staying and OK (5), and staying but would rather leave (2). No relationship was found between length of absence and future outcomes, with approximately 60% of those gone 6 months or less and more than 6 months saying they are leaving the Army and are happy with that outcome.



**Figure 22. Respondent Feelings About Army Future**

### **Open-Ended Comments**

RSQ respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional comments in a space at the end of the survey form. In all 101, or 23%, chose to do so. Several themes emerged from these comments.

*The Army needs to rethink the way they treat Soldiers.*

Just stop all the stupid things, such as making a Soldier wear a long sleeve BDU top outside when its 90 degrees. Let him/her wear hats if they feel like it. Act a little more civilian. If a Soldier wants to take his hat outside let him/her. Quit asking us to be freedom fighters for people with more freedom than we have.

Treat us like adults and not like kids. You'll get a lot more respect. If you treat us with respect and can be straight forward with things and not lying about it.

The Army doesn't let a person be an individual. Nobody wants to live with people controlling your every move.

You should be allowed to smoke, chew, or drink alcoholic beverage as long as it doesn't stop or impair you from doing your job, smoking, chewing in designated area, drinking on weekend's only.

*Potential recruits should be told the truth about Army life and their futures.*

If everything would have been made clear to me from the beginning, I wouldn't be in this situation.

I never expected to be this person, but I think my mental history was too much for what I chose. I informed my recruiter of my history and he told me, "lie, you'll be fine, you'll love military life." I just wish recruiters were more serious about these things.

I wish recruiters would practice integrity.

Your system of recruitment needs to be changed.

*The Army is not the right choice for everyone.*

Take into consideration that everyone is not built for this whether they committed to a contract or not.

I made a mistake in signing up, just like the Army videos say, "The Army is not for everyone." I know it's not for me. I've never been in any trouble in my life, and I am a happier person at home around my family and working for a civilian kind of life.

The Army is not the place for a young to go who is trying to start a family.

*Regret going AWOL, causing problems.*

Going AWOL was the biggest mistake of my life. I had everything going for me and threw it away. But I'm glad to be finished with everything so I can move on with my life.

I made a mistake and I apologize for doing it this way. It was very stupid of me and inconsiderate. I apologize.

This is not a decision of mine that I am proud of, and I have unconditional respect for anyone in the Army or any military service for that matter. I am extremely embarrassed about what I've done, and also incredibly sorry about the trouble I caused.

## **Results--Supervisor Survey**

### **Overview of Sample**

Completed surveys were received from 241 supervisors. Of these, 64% identified themselves as Staff Sergeants, while the remainder held the rank of Sergeant First Class. Their average tenure with the Army was 13 years, with an average leadership tenure of 9 years. Respondents were asked to indicate the number of Soldiers they currently have under their command, and this ranged from 0 to 200, with an average of 44. Finally, 82 respondents (34%) indicated that they did not know any AWOL Soldiers well enough to have formed impressions of their abilities and attitudes. These individuals were directed to skip to the final section of the survey which addressed general attitudes regarding AWOL and desertion.

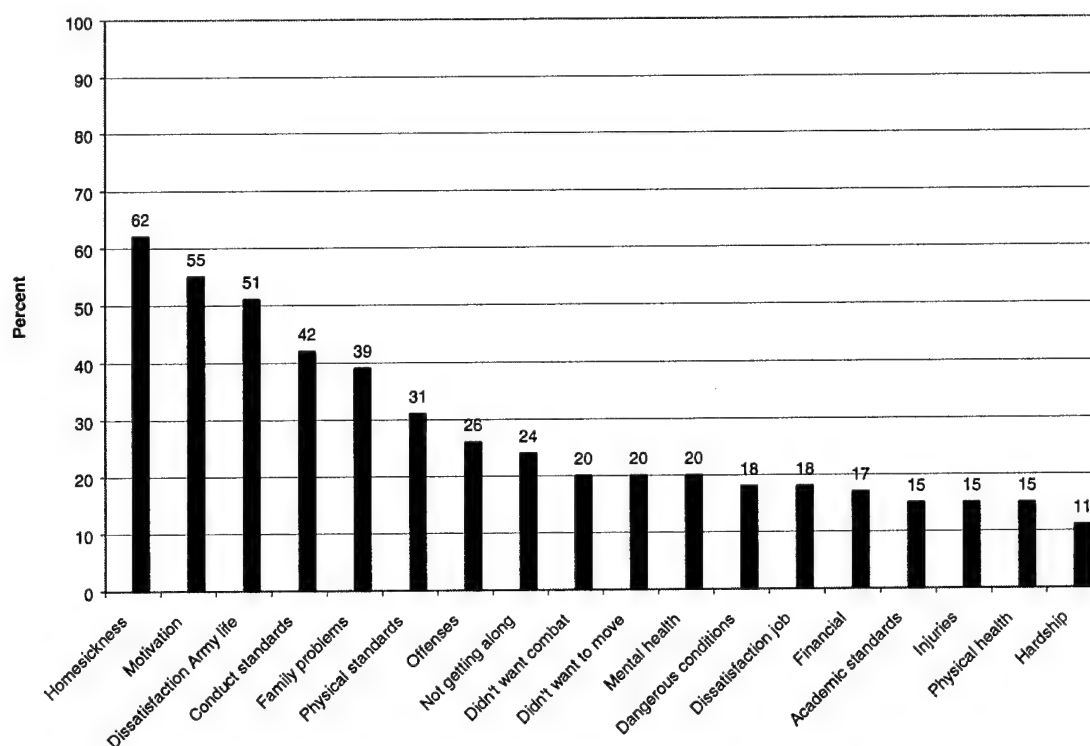
### **Deserter Background**

Supervisors were asked to think about a particular case of AWOL/desertion with which they are familiar. They entered the individual's name, and then answered a series of questions about the Soldier and their relationship to him or her. The majority of respondents (69%) indicated that they were the direct supervisor of the deserter in question. Of the 46 who were not in this role, only 28 wrote in their relationship (11 other unit leaders, 15 senior drill Sergeants, and 2 "other").

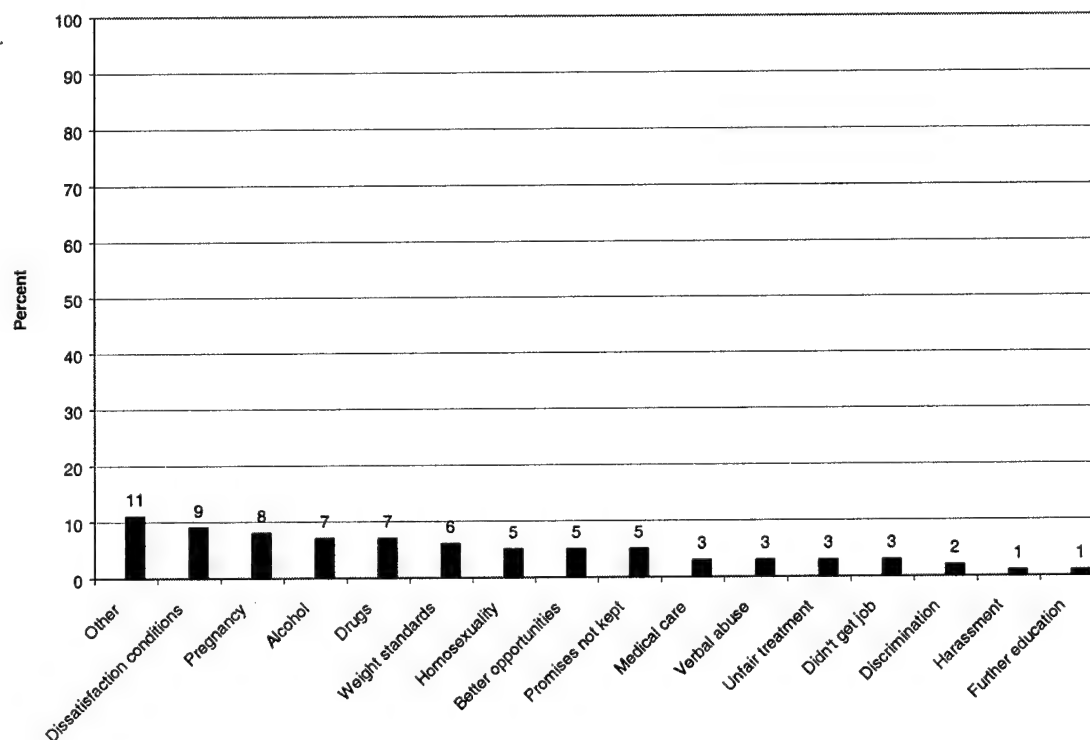
Nearly all (99%) of the deserters in question were male, and 88% departed from a training unit. An additional 8% deserted from an operational unit, and 4% from the reception station. The average tenure prior to deserting was 14 weeks, with 76% serving 12 weeks or less. Supervisors reported knowing the Soldier who deserted for an average of 12 weeks prior to their departure, with 83% stating they knew him/her 12 weeks or less. The average time from the survey completion date since the desertion took place was 25 weeks, with 34% having occurred within 4 weeks, 30% within 5-19 weeks, and 36% having occurred 20 or more weeks. Finally, 50% of respondents indicated that the Soldiers who deserted received disciplinary actions prior to their departure.

### **Reasons for AWOL/Desertion**

Supervisors were provided a list of 34 factors that might lead a Soldier to desert and asked to: (a) select all causes that applied in the case of the deserter they knew, and; (b) select the first, second, and third most important reasons. Figures 23 and 24 present the results when respondents picked all factors they thought contributed to the Soldier taking unauthorized leave.



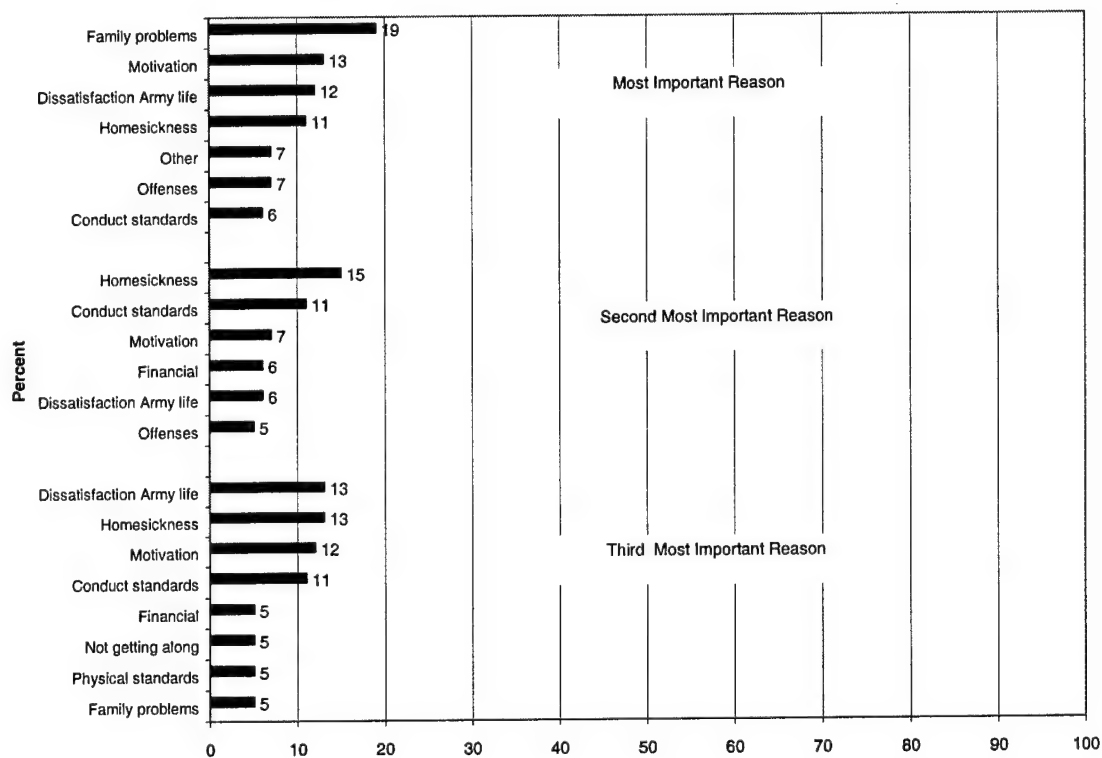
**Figure 23. Factors Contributing to AWOL/Desertion**



**Figure 24. Factors Contributing to AWOL/Desertion**

More than half of these supervisors indicated that homesickness (62%), lack of motivation (55%) and dissatisfaction with Army life (51%) contributed to Soldiers taking unauthorized leave. Although failure to meet standards of conduct (42%) and physical standards (31%) were endorsed by relatively large percentages of supervisors, the same cannot be said for other performance-based causes such as failure to meet academic/job standards (15%) and not meeting weight standards (6%).

Figure 25 presents the influences judged by 5% or more of supervisors as being the first, second, and third most important reasons why the Soldier in question went AWOL. Although family problems were judged by the largest proportion of respondents (19%) to be the most important reason for the Soldier's unauthorized leave, motivation, dissatisfaction with Army life, homesickness, and failing to meet standards of conduct were selected by more than 5% in all three categories (i.e., 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> most important factor).



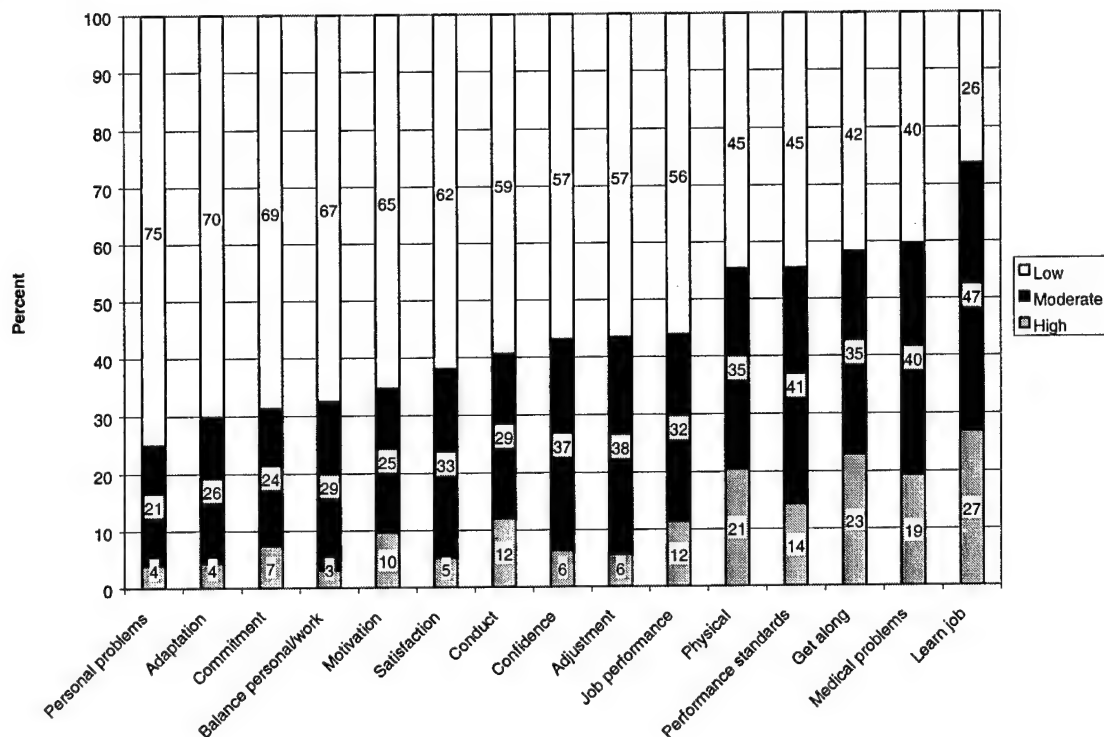
**Figure 25. Reasons for Going AWOL Selected as First, Second, and Third Most Important by More than Five Percent of Supervisors**

When compared with the responses of deserters themselves (page 20), certain commonalities are found. Family problems, homesickness, and dissatisfaction with Army life were all among the reasons judged to be most important by both parties. Not surprisingly, supervisors were more likely to cite as "most important" causes related to the Soldier's behavior (e.g., motivation, committing offenses, failure to meet standards of conduct). Conversely, more than 5% of deserters cited the Army's failure to keep

promises made as first, second, and third most important influence on their taking unauthorized leave, while this was selected by 1% or less of supervisors in each instance.

### Supervisor Ratings of Deserters

Supervisors were asked to rate the Soldier who went AWOL on 15 dimensions, using a 5-point scale (5 = very low, 1 = very high). They were also given the option of indicating that they didn't know enough to make the rating. This option was selected by less than 5% of supervisors, except in the case of ability to deal with medical problems (14%) and personal problems (10%). Figure 26 presents the results from those supervisors who provided ratings.



**Figure 26. Supervisor Ratings of Deserter**

As might be expected, small proportions of supervisors of Soldiers who went AWOL/deserted rated them as "high" on any of the dimensions. A majority provided low or very low ratings on 10 of the 15 dimensions, with three quarters indicating that deserters were not able to deal with personal and family problems. The dimensions on which the majority of supervisors gave moderate-high ratings were ability to meet physical (80%) and performance (86%) standards, getting along with others (77%), dealing with medical problems (80%) and learning job tasks (73%).

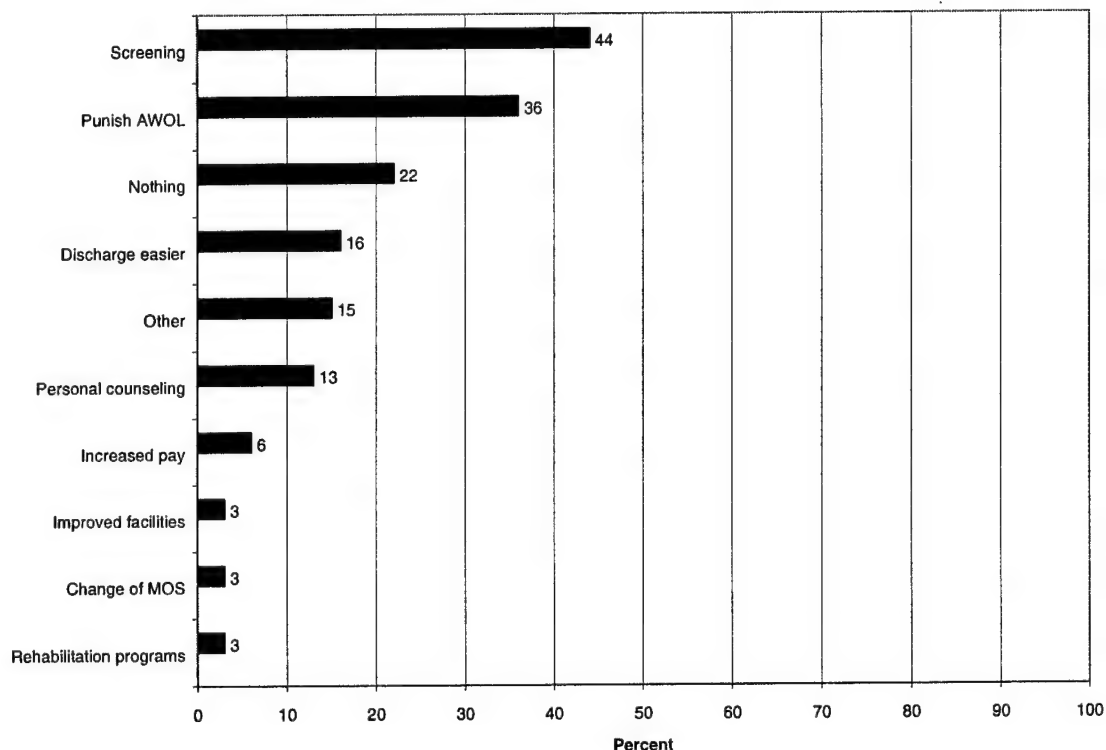
### Interventions

Supervisors were asked if anyone was aware that the Soldier in question was having problems prior to their going AWOL. Only about one quarter (22%) indicated that

someone was very aware of this fact, while 34% said they were somewhat aware and 44% completely unaware. Of those who had some knowledge that the Soldier was experiencing difficulties (82 supervisors), 54% said that the Soldier him/herself was the one who alerted them, 38% indicated that the individual's behavior made it clear that something was amiss, and 27% responded that other Soldiers talked about the situation. (Respondents could mark all answers that applied.)

When asked if assistance or counseling was provided to the Soldier prior to going AWOL, 73 supervisors (88% of those who were aware of problems) indicated that this was the case. Respondents were then asked to indicate what specific help was given and, again, multiple responses were allowed. In 44 instances, advice on personal matters was offered, 37 referred the Soldier to others for help, 36 provided advice on work/training matters, 25 engaged in mentoring, and 8 sought administrative assistance.

Respondents were presented a list of 18 actions that might be taken to prevent a Soldier from going AWOL, and asked to select those that could have applied in the case to which they were referring. Eight of the options were endorsed by 2% (3 supervisors) or less of those who completed this portion of the survey (more job/training assistance, lenient leave policy, reduced harassment, better leadership, more meaningful work, transfer units, more lenient AWOL policy, and better recognition of accomplishments). The percentages selecting the other options are shown in Figure 27.



**Figure 27. Percent of Supervisors Indicating Interventions May Have Prevented AWOL**

The preponderance of supervisors endorsed the notion that better initial entry screening would have helped, presumably by keeping the individual out of the Army to begin with. Over one third felt that increasing the severity of the punishment for going AWOL would have made the Soldier think twice, while 16% indicated that making it easier to discharge troubled Soldiers would have had an impact—again by getting him/her out of the Army before the unauthorized leave was taken. Generally speaking, proactive steps were not widely endorsed. Only 13% indicated that more personal counseling would have helped, and less than 10% endorsed the notion of increased pay, improved facilities, change of jobs, or rehabilitation programs. Nearly one quarter (22%) categorically stated that no intervention would have prevented the AWOL from occurring.

## **Outcomes**

In 38% of the cases (44 respondents), supervisors indicated that the deserter had been returned to the Army. Of these individuals, 28 said that he/she was the subject of disciplinary action, 14 indicated that rehabilitation efforts were undertaken, and 13 said the Soldier was released. (More than one option could be selected.) When asked if they felt the case had been dealt with appropriately, 20 respondents (53%) indicated that it had, and 18 said it had not. Of the latter, 17 provided written comments about what should have happened. Seven indicated that some (more) severe form of punishment should have been meted out (e.g., jail, court martial), and two suggested that Soldiers who do not want to be in the Army should be released. The remainder offered details about their specific case.

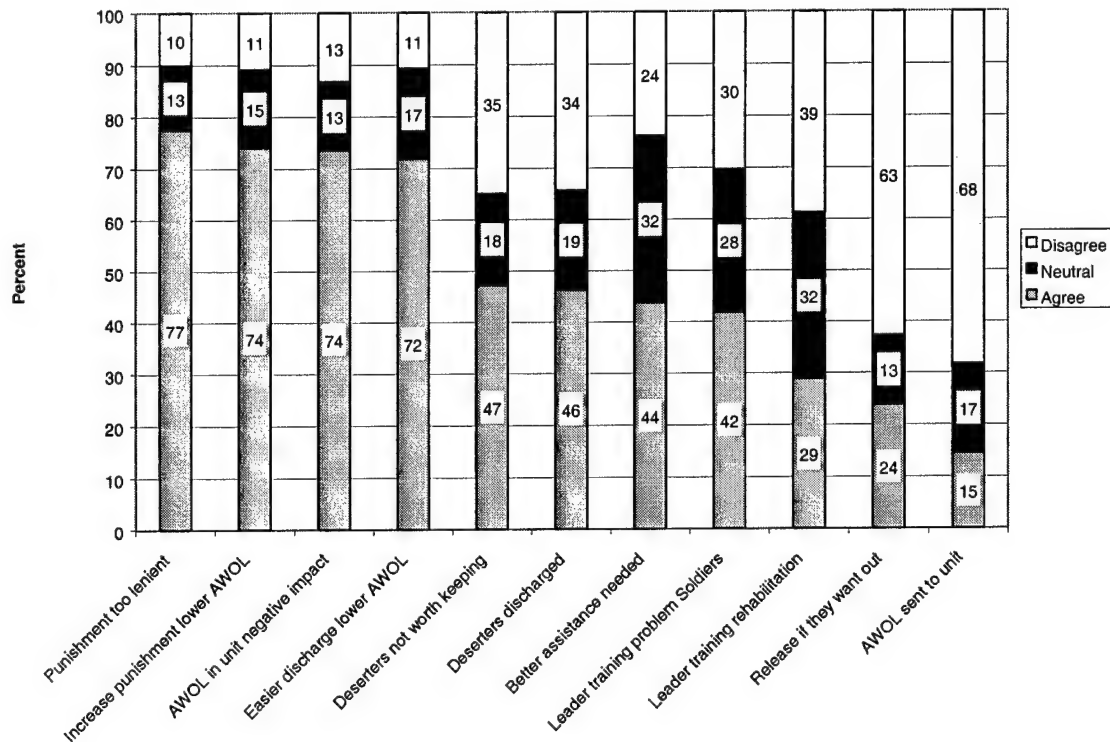
Supervisors who indicated that the deserter had not been returned to the Army, or who were not sure (102 cases), were asked if disciplinary action should be taken upon the Soldier's return. Almost all of those who answered this question (96%) indicated it should. A jail sentence was recommended by the preponderance of these respondents (43%), followed by nonjudicial punishment (18%), court martial (15%), and separation from service (14%). When asked if efforts should be made to rehabilitate the Soldier, 78% of supervisors said no. By way of explanation, 27% stated that doing so would be waste of time and money, 24% indicated that the Soldier could not be rehabilitated, and 10% felt that the individual did not want to be in the Army and so should be released. Other responses included statements that the Soldier was bad for morale (6 supervisors), that he/she couldn't be trusted (6 supervisors), and that he/she would go AWOL again (4 supervisors).

## **Opinions Regarding Desertion/AWOL**

Supervisors were presented a series of 11 statements regarding AWOL and desertion, and asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with each one (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). These results are presented in Figure 28. Strong majorities of respondents agreed that the punishment for going AWOL is too lenient (77%), that increasing punishment would lower the incidence of AWOL (74%), that returning AWOL Soldiers to their original units has a negative impact (74%), and that



making it easier to discharge individuals who are not working out would decrease desertion (72%). Conversely, majorities disagreed that deserters should be returned to their unit (68%), or that Soldiers should be released if they want out of the Army (63%). Given these sentiments, it is somewhat surprising that over one third of supervisors disagreed that deserters are not worth retaining and that they should be discharged. Also of interest is the relatively high level of agreement that the Army needs to provide better assistance to Soldiers to prevent desertion (44%), and that leader training in dealing with problem Soldiers is needed (42%).



**Figure 28. Supervisor Opinions Regarding AWOL/Desertion**

### Open-Ended Responses

Supervisors were given the option of entering comments, either about the Soldier they described in the survey or about desertion in general. In all, 54 respondents provided input of this nature (see Appendix B for verbatim comments). Many of the comments included statements regarding the perception that the punishment for desertion is not harsh enough.

Desertion should be dealt with more severely. It's no different than being a traitor to your country. They should be shot or do jail time until their sentence is up. Soldiers know what they can get away with because they see everyone doing it without any negative effects.

Bottom line the punishment is too lenient. Hold them accountable for the actions regardless of the situation. Often too many Soldiers use many

creative measures to justify the reason, but I strongly believe it is done just to cover their butt. We as Commander and leaders must not fall for many or our Soldiers excuses or justification for their actions.

Desertion should be consider just like it use to be, a very serious crime. There is not room for them in the Army after they leave deserters should never return to Army unit in the Army other than jail. No sympathy.

Several comments concerned the enlistment screening process.

A better screening process at recruiting level. Start with a better material, produce a better product.

I think that the Army should set up a two or three week program in which potential servicemembers attend before reporting to OSUT/Basic Training. That program should be the caliber as it is in red phase. That way if the Soldier does not like it, he does not have to sign the contract to enlist in the Army. Also it would be beneficial to have recruiters tell the truth and maybe show them a movie depicting what Soldiers go through at basic training. But overall if he wants to get out, let him out. If not most of the time they do go AWOL.

A number of these supervisors felt that Soldiers who want out of the Army should be released.

Persons starting there career with the military and going to basic training is a challenge to some. I think the military is not for everyone! The leaders do not need to baby sit persons who go AWOL. By sending them home leaders can spend more time with the ones who want to train and who want to be there.

If a Soldier displays a strong desire to go home, we should get rid of them. Don't keep someone against their will. Charge Soldier for money the government spent on them and discharge, but only if counseling and other means doesn't work.

Some supervisors included potential solutions to the problem, at least for some deserters who they feel could succeed.

Some Soldiers who go AWOL or desert may have good intentions. This could be due to a death in the family or a sickness. Financial reasons could also be a concern. I believe that if you cure and counsel Soldiers they will stay in this great Army. Sometimes all they need is support in the situations. Army leaders sometimes ignore the human factor in their Soldiers. Problems occur that need to be addressed now, not when they get time.

If it were easier to change a Soldier's duty station with another private who wants to go to that duty station in special circumstances it would help the problem in this Soldier's situation.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The data collected through the RSQ and supervisor survey do point to several conclusions that may be of use to Army leadership. These include indications of who is prone to make the decision to go AWOL and the circumstances that surround this decision. At the same time, this study lays a foundation for ongoing collection of information from deserters, should the Army wish to do so.

#### **Conclusions/Implications Regarding the Problem of Desertion**

*At least some characteristics of deserters identified in previous research are supported by these data.*

To the extent the data are available, they support trends found in past research regarding characteristics of individuals who go AWOL. As summarized in Ramsberger and Bell (2002), compared to their peers deserters from various eras were:

- less educated and of lower aptitude
- more likely to be from broken homes and have pre-service delinquencies
- younger at entry, have less time in service and lower ranks
- more likely to be in combat MOS and have committed in-service offenses

Although somewhat limited in scope, the data from the present study support some of these trends. Over three quarters of respondents were rank E-1 or E-2, and nearly half were in Combat MOS. (At lower levels, rank is confounded with the fact that over half of these deserters went AWOL before having completed 6 months of Army service.) A recent study of moral character waiver screening found that, among recruits who entered the Army between 1 June and 30 September 2001, 5.8% required a waiver to be admitted (Putka, Sipes, & Ramsberger, 2002). According to the self-reports of RSQ respondents, 9% of those who knew whether they needed a moral waiver reported that they did. This suggests a higher incidence of pre-service delinquencies among these deserters, also in line with previous findings.

*The reasons these deserters cite for enlisting in the Army vary in notable ways from those given by Soldiers in other research studies.*

Also of potential interest were the comparisons between these deserters and Soldiers who took part in the study of the 1999 cohort of Army recruits in terms of their reasons for enlisting (Strickland, 2004). Although the response formats for these items were different in the two studies (i.e., deserters selected factors that influenced them to

join, 1999 Soldiers rated the importance of each reason), the variations in the two groups are still suggestive. Perhaps of greatest interest was the fact that 24% of RSQ respondents selected "get away from a personal problem" as influencing them to join the Army, while only 11% of the 1999 cohort said this was an extremely or very important reason for their enlisting. Other large deviations between the two groups include a much higher endorsement among the 1999 cohort Soldiers of such motivations to enlist as developing self discipline, medical care, independence, pay, job security, and training. This suggests a potentially higher inclination to desert among those who are less motivated to join for reasons of financial security and/or self improvement. However, because desertion is still a relatively rare phenomenon, recommending screening out on the basis of motivation for enlisting would undoubtedly result in the loss of many potentially effective Soldiers. This may, however, be considered in the case of those with additional drawbacks (e.g., requiring a moral waiver, less than high school graduate).

*Although most Soldiers deserted early in their careers, substantial numbers only did so after achieving some success in the Army.*

As mentioned previously, over half of the RSQ respondents indicated that they went AWOL before completing 6 months of service. However, 42% were in Advanced Individual Training (AIT). This suggests that the potential for desertion exists even among those who have experienced some success in the Army, and leadership needs to remain constantly aware of the stresses that cause individuals to take this action.

*Soldiers either don't think about deserting before doing so, or don't think about it for long.*

A finding that highlights the potential difficulty in intervening with Soldiers who are having problems before they take unauthorized leave is the fact that 38% reported that they didn't think about going AWOL in advance, and 29% said they only considered it some days before they left. The fact that so many of these deserters acted on impulse—and before considering other options or the potential ramifications of this move—highlights the importance of providing assistance to Soldiers who are having problems as soon as possible after those problems begin to develop. In many cases, by the time there is some sign or signal that going AWOL is being considered, it may be too late to intervene.

*Although most of these deserters reported seeking help with challenges they faced before leaving the Army, a substantial number did not.*

The importance of being aware of difficulties Soldiers are confronting, either within or outside their Army careers, is further highlighted by the fact that one third of the RSQ respondents indicated they did not seek assistance with problems they were experiencing prior to leaving. This suggests that leadership must take a proactive stance in identifying individuals who are facing challenges that may appear to be best solved by taking unauthorized leave. At the same time, the majority of these respondents indicated that they did seek assistance, but it was either not received or was lacking in some way.

The fact that nearly half of the supervisors indicated that no one was aware that the deserter was experiencing problems prior to his/her departure underlines the need for open communication lines so that issues can be addressed quickly and before they lead to drastic steps being taken.

*Most of these deserters did not consider their decision to leave as necessarily meaning the end of their Army careers.*

Over half of the RSQ respondents said they were not sure how long they planned on being away when they went AWOL, and only 27% said they had no intention of coming back. This suggests that, at least from the perspective of the Soldiers themselves, repatriation is a real possibility. As evidenced by the reasons given for leaving, many of these Soldiers had concrete problems that they felt could not be dealt with unless they took unauthorized leave. And it seems that, in the preponderance of cases, there was at least some intention to return to the Army when the issues they confronted were resolved. Current efforts to reclaim Soldiers who go AWOL may in fact be welcomed by them, rather than met with resistance. Although 61% of RSQ respondents said they were leaving the Army and were happy about it, 36% expressed at least some ambivalence about ending their military careers.

*The primary reasons Soldiers give for going AWOL include dissatisfaction with the Army, family problems, and homesickness. Supervisors agreed with this assessment, but also felt behavioral problems (e.g., motivation, inability to meet standards of conduct) played a role.*

The reasons RSQ respondents gave for taking unauthorized leave provide some indication of the proportion of deserters who may in fact be candidates for return to the Army. In examining the most important reason for leaving, the largest percentage (21%) of these deserters cited family problems at home, as did supervisors (19%). Depending on the nature of such problems, it seems possible that many in this number could be returned to the Army when they are resolved. Another 28%, however, cited issues that, on the surface, do not seem to lend themselves to easy resolution and return. These included homesickness (10%), dissatisfaction with Army life (8%), and issues with mental health or treatment by the Army (5% each). These results were mirrored by supervisors, 43% of whom selected as the most important reason for leaving factors that may not be remediable (e.g., motivation, dissatisfaction with Army life). In all, this suggests that several tactics could be taken to address issues that cause Soldiers to take unauthorized leave, including allowing greater contact with loved ones as a means of reducing homesickness, and working with Soldiers to find solutions to family problems (e.g., extended leave).

On the other hand, supervisors paint a picture of deserters suggesting that, in many instances, the Army may be better off without these individuals. This is evidenced by generally low ratings given on performance dimensions, and general agreement that efforts to rehabilitate are not called for. Of course, it is impossible to determine whether these were the views held prior to the desertion, or the degree to which they have been

tainted by the act itself. Overall, though, it seems clear that in a large number of cases, the deserters didn't want to be in the Army, and leadership feels better off for their leaving.

*Providing potential recruits realistic job/life previews may prevent the enlistment of individuals who are likely to become deserters.*

Over half of the RSQ respondents indicated that they were misled in some way about what to expect from their Army experience. It seems likely that many of these individuals would not have enlisted had they been aware of the demands that would be placed on them. Nearly half of supervisors agreed that better screening at enlistment would decrease the incidence of desertion, as would increasing the punishment for Soldiers who take this course.

*The longer individuals remain in AWOL status, the less likely it is that they will return to the Army voluntarily.*

One striking relationship found in these data was that nearly three quarters of those who were AWOL for 6 months or less returned voluntarily, while almost two thirds of those gone longer than 6 months were apprehended by authorities. However, no relationship was found between the length of absence and feelings about staying in or leaving the Army. Nearly equal percentages (approximately 60%) of those gone less than 6 months and those gone longer than 6 months indicated that they would be leaving the Army and were happy with that outcome. However, if we presume that repatriation is more likely among those who voluntarily return to the Army, it seems clear that the longer the absence, the less probable this outcome.

*Training for Army leaders on dealing with problem Soldiers may yield positive outcomes.*

Although supervisors held largely negative views of individuals who desert and felt that they should be punished more rigorously, nearly half did indicate that the Army should provide more assistance to troubled Soldiers and more or better training on how to deal with those who are experiencing problems.

*Supervisors generally agreed that returning deserters to their units is not a good policy.*

Nearly three quarters of supervisors felt that sending deserters back to the units they left has a negative impact on the unit as a whole, and only 15% agreed that reintegration into the Army is better accomplished by taking this step. This suggests that if this policy is maintained, more justification is needed so that Army leadership will have greater buy in and support for rehabilitation efforts.

## Conclusions/Implications Regarding Future Data Collection

Our experience with this data collection provides a basis for future efforts of this kind, should the Army choose to pursue them. These center around the process of collecting data, as well as the instrument used to do so.

Generally, the data collection went quite smoothly with minimum disruption to operations at the PCFs. Deserters were typically gathered on a weekly basis, depending on the flow of individuals through outprocessing. The average time to complete the survey sessions was just under 45 minutes. Survey administrators reported that, although some individuals seemed to take the experience less seriously than others, overall respondents were attentive and cooperative. The instructions provided were thorough, with the major question arising concerning the definition of a moral waiver, with which at least some respondents were unfamiliar.

In regard to the survey itself, it seems to have provided a fairly complete picture of the circumstances surrounding desertion as it occurred for these individuals. An examination of the written answers to various questions where respondents selected "other," suggests that in many cases they simply failed to see an existing response option that would have been appropriate to their circumstance, or wanted to expound on one or more of the answers they selected. In some cases, additional response options do seem warranted. These are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2. Possible Additional Response Options to Items on the RSQ**

Item Number/Subject	Additional Response Option(s)
1. Reasons for enlisting	Financial problems Stay out of trouble For the experience
7. Sources of assistance	Family/loved ones Fellow Soldiers Medical/Mental health assistance Red Cross
8. Where they were when they went AWOL	Reception Medical rehabilitation
17. Actions that might have prevented AWOL	Nothing Increased pay
21. Why returned voluntarily	My decision, wanted to get on with life My decision, wanted discharge
24. What will happen now	Don't know

Assuming that one aim in an ongoing deserter data collection effort would be a process in which the results could be easily tabulated and distributed to interested parties, we would recommend eliminating the open-ended items concerning why Soldiers left, why they did not consider other options, and what could have been done to prevent them from going AWOL. This recommendation is supported by the inclusiveness of the response options for closed-ended items that address these same issues. Further, it would undoubtedly result in a marked decrease in survey administration time. We would also

recommend, however, that the final, general open-ended item be retained so that respondents have the opportunity to provide comments about aspects of their desertion that were not covered through the survey items.



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**Appendix A**  
**Returning Soldier and Supervisor Surveys**

This survey is designed to obtain information about the experiences and opinions of soldiers who have been Absent Without Leave (AWOL) from the Army. The survey addresses a variety of topics about you, your experiences in the Army, and your absence. The information will be used to determine how well current programs and policies are addressing the needs of soldiers. Your responses will be used in conjunction with those of other soldiers to make adjustments to those policies and programs to ensure that the Army is doing all it can to guarantee success.

This survey is anonymous. No tracking of who completed a survey is desired or will be made. DO NOT place your name on this survey. Responses cannot and will not be used in any adverse proceeding. The survey is voluntary, but important to the Army. Thank you for your support for this survey program.

### NOTICE

1. **CAREFULLY READ EACH QUESTION AND ALL THE POSSIBLE RESPONSES** before selecting your response.
2. **DO NOT FOLD, TEAR, CUT, TRIM, STAPLE OR TAPE CLOSED, OR PLACE A LABEL ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE.**
3. **YOUR PARTICIPATION IS NEEDED.** The Army needs information about you in order to make informed decisions. Failure to respond to any question will not result in any penalty. However, your participation is encouraged so that the data will be complete and representative.
4. **USE THE RETURN ENVELOPE.** After you have completed the survey, please place the questionnaire in the envelope provided, seal the envelope, and return it to the person who gave it to you. The envelope is provided to help protect your privacy.

### PRIVACY ACT STATEMENT

1. The Department of the Army may collect the information requested in this survey under the authority of 10 United States Code 2358. Providing information in this questionnaire is voluntary. Failure to respond to any specific question will not result in any penalty.
2. Public Law 93-573 (Privacy Act of 1974) requires that you be informed of the purpose and uses to be made of the information collected. The information collected in the survey will be used solely for research purposes. In accordance with federal regulations, the survey data will be safeguarded to protect your privacy. Only survey statisticians involved in collecting or preparing the information for analysis will have access to completed questionnaires. Only group statistics will be reported.

### MARKING INSTRUCTIONS

- Use a No. 2 pencil.
- Fill in the circle completely.
- Erase cleanly any marks you wish to change.
- Do not make any stray marks on this form.

#### CORRECT MARK



#### INCORRECT MARKS



### Section I. Reasons for Enlisting

1. Listed below are some reasons why people join the Army. Please fill in the circle next to each factor that influenced you to join the Army.

(Mark all that apply.)

- ☐ a. Army advertising
- ☐ b. Army recruiter
- ☐ c. Desire to serve country
- ☐ d. Develop self-discipline
- ☐ e. Earn more money than previous jobs
- ☐ f. Educational benefits
- ☐ g. Family support services
- ☐ h. Get away from personal problem
- ☐ i. Influence of family
- ☐ j. Influence of friends
- ☐ k. Lack of civilian jobs
- ☐ l. Medical care
- ☐ m. Military tradition in family
- ☐ n. Need to be on my own
- ☐ o. Pay and allowances
- ☐ p. Retirement pay and benefits
- ☐ q. Security and stability of job
- ☐ r. Training in job skills
- ☐ s. Travel
- ☐ t. Other

(please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Of the factors marked in question 1, which was MOST important in influencing you to join the Army? (Mark only one.)

- |                         |                         |                            |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> a | <input type="radio"/> h | <input type="radio"/> o    |
| <input type="radio"/> b | <input type="radio"/> i | <input type="radio"/> p    |
| <input type="radio"/> c | <input type="radio"/> j | <input type="radio"/> q    |
| <input type="radio"/> d | <input type="radio"/> k | <input type="radio"/> r    |
| <input type="radio"/> e | <input type="radio"/> l | <input type="radio"/> s    |
| <input type="radio"/> f | <input type="radio"/> m | <input type="radio"/> t    |
| <input type="radio"/> g | <input type="radio"/> n | <input type="radio"/> none |

3. Of the factors marked in question 1, which was SECOND MOST important in influencing you to join the Army? (Mark only one.)

- |                         |                         |                            |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> a | <input type="radio"/> h | <input type="radio"/> o    |
| <input type="radio"/> b | <input type="radio"/> i | <input type="radio"/> p    |
| <input type="radio"/> c | <input type="radio"/> j | <input type="radio"/> q    |
| <input type="radio"/> d | <input type="radio"/> k | <input type="radio"/> r    |
| <input type="radio"/> e | <input type="radio"/> l | <input type="radio"/> s    |
| <input type="radio"/> f | <input type="radio"/> m | <input type="radio"/> t    |
| <input type="radio"/> g | <input type="radio"/> n | <input type="radio"/> none |

4. Of the factors marked in question 1, which was THIRD MOST important in influencing you to join the Army? (Mark only one.)

- |                         |                         |                            |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> a | <input type="radio"/> h | <input type="radio"/> o    |
| <input type="radio"/> b | <input type="radio"/> i | <input type="radio"/> p    |
| <input type="radio"/> c | <input type="radio"/> j | <input type="radio"/> q    |
| <input type="radio"/> d | <input type="radio"/> k | <input type="radio"/> r    |
| <input type="radio"/> e | <input type="radio"/> l | <input type="radio"/> s    |
| <input type="radio"/> f | <input type="radio"/> m | <input type="radio"/> t    |
| <input type="radio"/> g | <input type="radio"/> n | <input type="radio"/> none |

### Section II. Unauthorized Leave

5. How long have you been/were you in the Army?

- ☐ less than 6 months
- ☐ 6 - 12 months
- ☐ 13 - 18 months
- ☐ 19 - 24 months
- ☐ more than 24 months

6. When did you begin to think about going AWOL?

- ☐ A few days before I left
- ☐ 1 - 2 weeks before I left
- ☐ 3 - 4 weeks before I left
- ☐ more than a month before I left
- ☐ I didn't think about it in advance

7. Did you seek assistance with any problems you were having before you made the decision to go AWOL? (Mark all that apply.)

- ☐ Does not apply, I didn't have any problems
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, from my chain of command (e.g., unit leaders)
- ☐ Yes, from sources outside of my chain of command (e.g., chaplain)
- ☐ Yes, administratively (e.g., sought discharge, change in unit)
- ☐ Yes, other

(please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

8. Where were you when you went AWOL?

- ☐ in basic training
- ☐ in advanced individual training
- ☐ in One Station Unit Training (OSUT)
- ☐ in an operational unit stationed CONUS
- ☐ in an operational unit stationed OCONUS
- ☐ in transit from one operational unit to another
- ☐ in transit from training to operational unit
- ☐ on leave from training
- ☐ on leave from operational unit
- ☐ in recovery from an injury
- ☐ other

(please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**9. At the time you went AWOL, how long did you plan to be away?**

- ☐ 1 - 10 days
- ☐ 11 - 30 days
- ☐ over 30 days
- ☐ forever
- ☐ I wasn't sure/I had no plan

**7. Where did you go after you went AWOL?**

(Mark all that apply.)

- ☐ parent's home
  - ☐ home to my husband/wife
  - ☐ boyfriend/girlfriend's house
  - ☐ other friend's house
  - ☐ to a place of my own
  - ☐ stayed on the road (i.e., went from place to place)
  - ☐ other
- (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**11. Listed below are some factors that can cause soldiers to leave the Army. Please mark each factor you think played a role in your going AWOL.**

(Mark all that apply.)

- ☐ a. Couldn't meet physical standards
- ☐ b. Couldn't meet weight requirements
- ☐ c. Couldn't meet academic/job standards
- ☐ d. Couldn't meet standards of conduct
- ☐ e. In trouble with the Army/to avoid punishment
- ☐ f. Mental health problems
- ☐ g. Physical health problems
- ☐ h. Injuries sustained during training/work
- ☐ i. Pregnancy/parenthood
- ☐ j. Alcohol problems
- ☐ k. Drug problems
- ☐ l. Poor medical care
- ☐ m. Homesickness
- ☐ n. Sexual/gender/race discrimination
- ☐ o. Sexual harassment
- ☐ p. Family/marital problems
- ☐ q. Dependency/hardship
- ☐ r. Financial problems
- ☐ s. Lack of motivation
- ☐ t. Better opportunities outside the Army
- ☐ u. Want to further my education
- ☐ v. Verbal abuse from superiors
- ☐ w. Unfair treatment/punishment
- ☐ x. Army failed to keep promises made
- ☐ y. Didn't get desired job (MOS)
- ☐ z. Dissatisfaction with Army life
- ☐ aa. Dissatisfaction with job/training
- ☐ bb. Dissatisfaction with living conditions
- ☐ cc. Didn't want to move/deploy
- ☐ dd. Didn't want to engage in combat
- ☐ ee. Not getting along with others
- ☐ ff. Other

(please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Of the factors marked in question 11, which do you think was MOST influential in leading you to go AWOL? (Mark only one circle below.)**

- |                         |                         |                            |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> a | <input type="radio"/> l | <input type="radio"/> w    |
| <input type="radio"/> b | <input type="radio"/> m | <input type="radio"/> x    |
| <input type="radio"/> c | <input type="radio"/> n | <input type="radio"/> y    |
| <input type="radio"/> d | <input type="radio"/> o | <input type="radio"/> z    |
| <input type="radio"/> e | <input type="radio"/> p | <input type="radio"/> aa   |
| <input type="radio"/> f | <input type="radio"/> q | <input type="radio"/> bb   |
| <input type="radio"/> g | <input type="radio"/> r | <input type="radio"/> cc   |
| <input type="radio"/> h | <input type="radio"/> s | <input type="radio"/> dd   |
| <input type="radio"/> i | <input type="radio"/> t | <input type="radio"/> ee   |
| <input type="radio"/> j | <input type="radio"/> u | <input type="radio"/> ff   |
| <input type="radio"/> k | <input type="radio"/> v | <input type="radio"/> none |

**13. Of the factors marked in question 11, which do you think was SECOND MOST influential in leading you to go AWOL? (Mark only one circle below.)**

- |                         |                         |                            |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> a | <input type="radio"/> l | <input type="radio"/> w    |
| <input type="radio"/> b | <input type="radio"/> m | <input type="radio"/> x    |
| <input type="radio"/> c | <input type="radio"/> n | <input type="radio"/> y    |
| <input type="radio"/> d | <input type="radio"/> o | <input type="radio"/> z    |
| <input type="radio"/> e | <input type="radio"/> p | <input type="radio"/> aa   |
| <input type="radio"/> f | <input type="radio"/> q | <input type="radio"/> bb   |
| <input type="radio"/> g | <input type="radio"/> r | <input type="radio"/> cc   |
| <input type="radio"/> h | <input type="radio"/> s | <input type="radio"/> dd   |
| <input type="radio"/> i | <input type="radio"/> t | <input type="radio"/> ee   |
| <input type="radio"/> j | <input type="radio"/> u | <input type="radio"/> ff   |
| <input type="radio"/> k | <input type="radio"/> v | <input type="radio"/> none |

**14. Of the reasons marked in question 11, which do you think was THIRD MOST influential in leading you to go AWOL? (Mark only one circle below.)**

- |                         |                         |                            |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> a | <input type="radio"/> l | <input type="radio"/> w    |
| <input type="radio"/> b | <input type="radio"/> m | <input type="radio"/> x    |
| <input type="radio"/> c | <input type="radio"/> n | <input type="radio"/> y    |
| <input type="radio"/> d | <input type="radio"/> o | <input type="radio"/> z    |
| <input type="radio"/> e | <input type="radio"/> p | <input type="radio"/> aa   |
| <input type="radio"/> f | <input type="radio"/> q | <input type="radio"/> bb   |
| <input type="radio"/> g | <input type="radio"/> r | <input type="radio"/> cc   |
| <input type="radio"/> h | <input type="radio"/> s | <input type="radio"/> dd   |
| <input type="radio"/> i | <input type="radio"/> t | <input type="radio"/> ee   |
| <input type="radio"/> j | <input type="radio"/> u | <input type="radio"/> ff   |
| <input type="radio"/> k | <input type="radio"/> v | <input type="radio"/> none |

**Please continue on the next page.**

[illegible]

This image shows a full page of primary-ruled notebook paper. It features multiple sets of horizontal lines designed for teaching handwriting. Each set consists of a solid top blue line, a dashed middle blue line, and a solid bottom blue line. The sets are repeated down the entire page, providing ample space for practicing letter formation and alignment. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

(Mark all that apply.)

- (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

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- ☐ Personnel Control Facility
- ☐ Other detention facility
- ☐ With the unit from which I went AWOL
- ☐ With the unit to which I was headed when I went AWOL
- ☐ At a reception company or battalion
- ☐ Other  
(please specify)

☐ I got caught

☐ I came back on my own

**21. If you returned to the Army on your own, what influenced you to make that decision?**

*(Mark all that apply.)*

- ☐ Not applicable, I was caught
- ☐ Fear of getting caught
- ☐ Spouse influence
- ☐ Other family influence
- ☐ Friends influence
- ☐ Army influence
- ☐ My decision, returning made my life simpler
- ☐ My decision, I wanted to honor my commitment to the Army
- ☐ Other

*(please specify)* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**22. How long were you AWOL? (if you have been AWOL more than once, answer regarding the most recent time.)**

- ☐ less than one month
- ☐ 1 - 2 months
- ☐ 3 - 4 months
- ☐ 5 - 6 months
- ☐ 7 - 8 months
- ☐ 9 - 10 months
- ☐ 11 - 12 months
- ☐ more than one year

**23. How long has it been since you returned from being AWOL?**

- ☐ less than one month
- ☐ 1 - 3 months
- ☐ 4 - 6 months
- ☐ 7 - 12 months
- ☐ 13 - 18 months
- ☐ more than 18 months

**24. To the best of your knowledge, what will be happening to you in the immediate future?**

*(Mark all that apply.)*

- ☐ I will be released from the Army
- ☐ I will return to my former Army unit
- ☐ I will return to another Army unit
- ☐ Other

*(please specify)* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**25. Which of the following statements best describes the type of punishment you have received or will receive because you were AWOL?**

- ☐ Not applicable, I am being discharged
- ☐ I will not receive punishment
- ☐ Company level punishment
- ☐ Court marshal
- ☐ Don't know

**26. Which of the following statements best describes your feelings about the Army right now?**

- ☐ I am remaining in the Army and I'm happy about it
- ☐ I am remaining in the Army and I feel OK about it
- ☐ I am remaining in the Army but I'd rather not be
- ☐ I am being discharged but would prefer to remain in the Army
- ☐ I am being discharged and I feel OK about it
- ☐ I am being discharged and I'm happy about it

*Please continue on the next page.*

### Section III. Background

27. Are you male or female?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

28. How old were you at the time you went AWOL?

- ☐ 17
- ☐ 18
- ☐ 19
- ☐ 20
- ☐ 21
- ☐ 22
- ☐ 23
- ☐ 24
- ☐ 25
- ☐ 26 or older

29. When you went AWOL, were you ...

- ☐ single, never married
- ☐ single, engaged to be married
- ☐ single, with steady boy/girlfriend
- ☐ married
- ☐ legally separated or divorced
- ☐ widowed

30. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (MARK ONE)

- ☐ Some high school or less, but no diploma, certificate, or GED
- ☐ High school diploma or GED
- ☐ From 1 to 2 years of college, but no degree
- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ From 3 to 4 years of college, but no degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ A year or more of graduate credit, but no graduate degree
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Doctorate degree
- ☐ Professional degree, such as MD, DDS, or JD

31. Did you need to get a moral waiver to be admitted to the Army?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

32. Which of the following best describes your Army MOS or the MOS you would be in when you completed training?

- ☐ Combat (e.g., Infantry)
- ☐ Combat Support (e.g., Combat Engineer, Military Police)
- ☐ Combat Service Support (e.g., Maintenance, Supply, Administration)

33. What was your Army rank at the time you went AWOL?

- ☐ E-1
- ☐ E-2
- ☐ E-3
- ☐ E-4
- ☐ E-5
- ☐ E-6 or higher

34. Did you receive any disciplinary actions while in the Army?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Use the space below to provide any further comments you may have.



**When completed, treat this document as  
FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY**

**Supervisor Survey: AWOL Soldiers**

**Over the past several years, AWOL and desertion rates have been on the rise in the U.S. Army. As a result, a project has been initiated to find out more about this phenomenon, including:**

- Why Soldiers go AWOL and desert.
- What steps can be taken to prevent this from occurring.
- What the prospects are for successfully returning to Army service those who go AWOL or desert.

**To answer these and other questions, we are collecting data from Army leaders regarding desertion and individual deserters. We hope this will provide a picture of why Soldiers leave the Army in this way and, therefore, insight into steps that can be taken to prevent this from happening.**

**This survey has three parts:**

- Part I asks for some general information about you. This will allow us to determine if there are differences in the viewpoints of leaders based on their background (e.g., time in the Army, number of Soldiers supervised).
- Part II asks you to provide information about a specific case of AWOL/desertion with which you are familiar in your role as a supervisor. This may be a Soldier who was under your direct command, or someone from another unit that you happen to know about. We ask that you choose a recent case (in the past year, if possible) in which you knew the Soldier well enough to have an impression of his/her performance and attitude.
- Part III asks for your opinions about desertion in general and the way in which it should be handled by the Army.

Please take a few minutes and complete this survey. All data will be confidential, and no identifying information will be released to anyone outside the team conducting the research (The Army Research Institute and the Human Resources Research Organization). Please seal the completed survey in the envelope marked "For Official Use Only." Then return it to the POC for this survey effort (i.e., the person who gave it to you), or mail to: The Human Resources Research Organization, Survey Processing Center, 66 Canal Center Plaza, Suite 400, Alexandria, VA 22314.

If you have any questions about this survey, you can call or e-mail the following POCs:

*Again, thank you for your input..*

## Section I. Your Background

### 1. Rank (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_

### 2. How long have you been in the Army?

\_\_\_\_\_ years

### 3. How long have you been in a leadership position (e.g., rank Sgt. or above)?

\_\_\_\_\_ years

### 4. How many Soldiers are currently under your direct supervision?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

***For the next section of the survey, we ask that you think about a specific Soldier who went AWOL or deserted from training. Please select:***

- ***someone that you knew in your role as a supervisor;***
- ***someone you knew well enough to have formed an impression about their abilities and attitudes.***

***If possible, try to select someone who went AWOL or deserted in the recent past (i.e., within the past year). If there are multiple cases with which you are familiar, pick the Soldier you knew best.***

***If you have not known any Soldiers who went AWOL/deserted well enough to have formed impressions of their abilities and attitudes, mark the box below and continue with Section III (Question 28) of this survey.***

☐ ***As a supervisor, I have not been familiar with any Soldiers who went AWOL or deserted***

## Section II. About a Case of AWOL/Desertion With Which You Are Familiar

**Please enter the name of the Soldier you have selected who went AWOL/deserted.**

\_\_\_\_\_

### 5. Were you this Soldier's direct supervisor?

Yes (skip to question 7)

No

### 6. If you were not the Soldier's immediate supervisor, describe your relationship (e.g., 1SG, Unit CDR, PLT LDR, Senior Rater, Intermediate Rater, Reviewer)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 7. Was this Soldier:

Male?

Female?

### 8. Did this Soldier take unauthorized leave:

from a training unit?

from an operational unit?

### 9. To the best of your knowledge, approximately how long had this Soldier served in the Army before going AWOL?

\_\_\_\_\_ weeks

### 10. How long did you know this Soldier prior to his/her going AWOL?

\_\_\_\_\_ weeks

### 11. Approximately how long has it been since this Soldier went AWOL?

\_\_\_\_\_ weeks

### 12. To the best of your knowledge, did this Soldier receive any disciplinary actions while in the Army?

☐ Yes

☐ No

- 13. Please rate this Soldier on the following dimensions. As best you can, please rate him/her as you think you would have prior to their going AWOL.**

	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
a. level of confidence as a Soldier.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. motivation as a Soldier....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. satisfaction with the Army	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. ability to get along with other Soldiers.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. commitment to completing term of service.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. job performance.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. ability to balance work and personal demands.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. ability to adapt to Army life.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i. ability to meet Army physical standards.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j. ability to meet Army performance standards.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
k. ability to meet Army standards of conduct .....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
l. ability to learn job tasks...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
m. ability to deal with medical problems.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
n. ability to deal with personal and family problems..	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
o. adjustment to current unit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- 14. Was anyone aware that this Soldier was experiencing problems prior to his/her going AWOL?**

☐ Very aware  
☐ Somewhat aware  
☐ Not at all aware (*skip to question 18*)

- 15. How did people become aware that this Soldier was experiencing problems prior to his/her going AWOL? (Mark all that apply)**

☐ Soldier talked about it  
☐ Other Soldiers talked about it  
☐ Other person(s) talked about it (e.g., family member)  
☐ Could tell by his/her behavior  
☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

- 16. Was assistance or counseling provided to this Soldier?**

☐ Yes  
☐ No, he/she didn't seem to need assistance  
☐ No, he/she refused offers of assistance  
☐ No, there was no time to provide assistance  
☐ No, he/she went AWOL before assistance could be provided  
☐ No, there was nothing that could be done to address his/her situation

- 17. If assistance was provided, what form did it take? (Mark all that apply.)**

☐ N/A, assistance was not provided  
☐ Advice on personal matters  
☐ Advice on work/training matters  
☐ Tutoring/mentoring  
☐ Administrative assistance (e.g., obtained leave, sought transfer)  
☐ Referral to others for help  
☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

- 18. Listed below are some factors that can cause Soldiers to leave the Army. Please mark each factor you think applied to the Soldier are describing in this survey. (Mark all that apply.)**

☐ a. Couldn't meet physical standards  
☐ b. Couldn't meet weight requirements  
☐ c. Couldn't meet academic/job standards  
☐ d. Couldn't meet standards of conduct  
☐ e. Committed offenses/avoiding punishment  
☐ f. Mental health problems  
☐ g. Physical health problems  
☐ h. Injuries sustained during training/work  
☐ i. Pregnancy/parenthood  
☐ j. Alcohol problems  
☐ k. Drug problems  
☐ l. Poor medical care  
☐ m. Homesickness  
☐ n. Sexual/gender/race discrimination  
☐ o. Sexual harassment  
☐ p. Homosexuality  
☐ q. Family/marital problems  
☐ r. Dependency/hardship  
☐ s. Financial problems  
☐ t. Lack of motivation  
☐ u. Better opportunities outside the Army  
☐ v. Wanted to further education  
☐ w. Verbal abuse from superiors  
☐ x. Unfair treatment/punishment  
☐ y. Army reneged on promises  
☐ z. Didn't get desired job (MOS)  
☐ aa. Dissatisfaction with Army life  
☐ bb. Dissatisfaction with job/training  
☐ cc. Dissatisfaction with living conditions  
☐ dd. Didn't want to move or deploy  
☐ ee. Didn't want to engage in combat  
☐ ff. Didn't want possibly dangerous assignments  
☐ gg. Not getting along with others  
☐ hh. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**20. Of the factors marked in question 18, which do you think was SECOND MOST influential in leading this Soldier to desert? (Mark only one circle below.)**

**21. Of the reasons marked in question 18, which do you think was THIRD MOST influential in leading this Soldier to desert? (Mark only one circle below.)**

**22. In your own words, what do you think was this Soldier's primary reason for leaving the Army?**

**23. What (additional) steps could have been taken to prevent this Soldier from going AWOL? (Mark all that apply)**

- ☐ More personal counseling
- ☐ More personal job/training assistance
- ☐ Lenient pass and leave policy
- ☐ Reduced harassment
- ☐ Better leadership
- ☐ More meaningful work
- ☐ Opportunity to change MOS
- ☐ Opportunity to transfer to another unit
- ☐ Better screening prior to enlistment
- ☐ Make discharge easier
- ☐ Improved facilities
- ☐ More severe punishment for AWOL/desertion
- ☐ Increased pay
- ☐ Lenient AWOL policy
- ☐ Better recognition of accomplishments
- ☐ Special rehabilitation programs
- ☐ None of the above/nothing
- ☐ Other (please specify)

**24. Was this Soldier returned to your unit**

- ☐ No  
☐ Yes

**25. What has been or will be done to this Soldier in terms of punishment and/or rehabilitation?**

**26. In your opinion, should this Soldier undergo disciplinary action because he/she went AWOL?**

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes → Please indicate what form of punishment you think would be suitable.

**27. In your opinion, do you think the Army should attempt to rehabilitate/retain this Soldier?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**28. Please explain why you think this Soldier should/should not be retained in the Army.**



**Appendix B**  
**Supervisor Comments**

**Please use the space below to provide any comments you may have about the Soldier you were referring to in this survey or about desertion in general.**

---

Desertion should be dealt with severely. It's no different than being a trader to your country. They should be shot or do jail time until their sentence is up. Soldiers know what they can get away with because they see everyone doing it without any negative effects.

---

Persons starting there career with the military and going to basic training is a challenge to some. I think the military is not for everyone! The leaders do not need to baby sit persons who go AWOL. By sending them home leaders can spend more time with the ones who want to train and who want to be there.

---

If my answer sound cold that is the intention. To many Soldier in the past have fought for the country, endured long years of hardship in place like the Pacific and Europe in the world wars or Korea or Vietnam. They stayed and did their duty. I have NO sympathy for a Soldier that goes AWOL. They should be treated as a criminal, and put in jail. I have been in 16 years been through some rough situations, and have never thought of going AWOL. I enjoy being in the Army and plan to stay a lot longer. As far as \_\_\_\_\_ goes he was weak, pathetic and not worth my efforts or the effort of any NCO, his excuse was weak and he should have been put in jail and left there. Like I said earlier you may not like my answer to these questions but it is the way I feel. I believe in taking care of Soldier, but not ones who leave their country when they're needed. Sent them to jail for at least a few years.

---

In my opinion AWOL and desertion can be decreased or prevented when a potential solder shows signs or makes suggestions of or about going AWOL. When a Soldier says that he does not want to be in the Army, in my opinion, the chain of command should release that Soldier from service.

---

There is not general consensus on what type of action should be taken on Soldiers who desert. Too many different philosophies among the leadership. Giving Article 15s isn't helping because you still have the Soldier. You're still responsible for him. There needs to be a place to send them. (Do not send to general population.) Soldiers get smart and realize nothing can be done, so they wait it out until they leave. Morale is bad in the platoon because they feel the Soldier is not pulling his weight or workload, so fights and arguments occur. They wonder why this Soldier who was AWOL is here, but is unmotivated when the platoon is trying to stay motivated and do what's right. There is not right in keeping AWOLS. By the way, when the police find them, we have to drive wherever they may be to pick them up. Does that make sense? Drive to Missouri for what?

---

If a Soldier displays a strong desire to go home, we should get rid of them. Don't keep someone against their will. Charge Soldier for money the government spent on them and discharge, but only if counseling and other means doesn't work.

---

The Army is better off without Private \_\_\_\_\_.

---

If a Soldier does not like the Army, let him go. If a Soldier goes AWOL he should be punished more severely. If he goes AWOL due to problems that his leadership failed to pay attention to, then the AWOL Soldier's punishment should be none or less severe. A lot of these privates sign the contract but fail to realize what they got themselves into. I think that the Army should set up a two or three week program in which potential servicemembers attend before reporting to OSUT/Basic Training. That program should be the caliber as it is in red phase. That way if the Soldier doesn't like it, he does not have to sign the contract to enlist in the Army. Also it would be beneficial to have recruiters tell the truth and maybe show them a movie depicting what Soldiers go through at basic training. But overall if he wants to get out, let him out. If not most of the time they do go AWOL.

---

Normally Soldiers who go AWOL don't want to be in the Army at all. It usually doesn't result from just one incident at home which upsets them. If a Soldier or trainee doesn't want to be in the Army then they should be outprocessed ASAP to lighten burden on the unit/leadership. Because they obviously don't want to be here. The Army needs to become selective like the other services.

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**Please use the space below to provide any comments you may have about the Soldier you were referring to in this survey or about desertion in general.**

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1) Incoming and outgoing privates are housed in the same area. The outgoing PVT informs the new incoming of ways to get out and what ELS (Entry Level Separation) means. 2) Everyone is worried about having high numbers of UCMJs and chapters. Worried about looking bad to outside units. 3) Other Soldiers in unit see a problem Soldier sit at CQ desk for 4 to 5 weeks and little or no UCMJ action was taken to punish his behavior and they think this is the standard. 4) Every thing is too political. It seems like we are worried about looking bad or hurting some feelings of the family members of the Soldier that raises his/her right hand and volunteers to enter the Army, but realizes after they get here they don't like it. It is too easy for them to get out and with no punishment. I understand the military is not made for everyone, but this is why we have short term enlistments. If they volunteer, sign a contract, they should be held to their word. If they can't then some type of action needs to be enforced.

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If a Soldier goes AWOL then more than likely he doesn't want to be in the Army. By bringing him back to the unit he was in, leaves someone of importance to watch him, making sure he doesn't try to leave again. There needs to be a place for Soldiers who go AWOL to return to. They should only return for punishment for going AWOL and then released with no way of returning to the Army.

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I believe desertion/AWOL should have a higher punishment to deter Soldiers from doing it. If a Soldier does go AWOL we shouldn't have the responsible unit search for the Soldier. They will eventually be caught and then they can be punished. The Soldiers know what they have to do to be discharged from the military, if the punishment was greater they may think twice before acting. A lot of the problems that the military has can be stopped at Basic Training. Why send a sub-standard Soldier to the force? All this does is create problems at the units. The military seems to be getting away from the basics such as discipline and motivation at the basic training level. We need to have disciplined Soldiers before we can learn the advanced tasks! I also feel this is also a big part in Soldiers deserting/AWOL. (Lack of discipline.)

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As a drill SGT in the Army, I see Soldiers go AWOL often. If they were dealt with severely, which would set an example for others to follow. We worry too much about hurting feelings and what the American people will think. America will be fine if we do our jobs and defend our country. Let's put the word on the street, "If you join, you're in, no getting out." You do like I've done, suck it up when times are hard.

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Every Soldier I can recall going AWOL that I have known was running from something. These include deployments, UCMJ action for disciplinary reasons, lack of motivation, or were in the Army for the wrong reasons. IET Soldiers generally go AWOL because they either do not want to live the Army standards or they might think they can not hack it any more. These are generally those Soldiers who are young and have never lived under true authority and have have no work ethic. They were not raised with responsibilities and a high standard of conduct. The few older Soldiers I have seen go AWOL was due to either a poor attitude because they thought they were to old to take orders or they had family issues. But they are few.

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Soldier was IET trainee with low self esteem. Tried helping him to train, Soldier would not train.

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Even though this is a voluntary Army the civilians who sign should be responsible for there actions. Not all AWOL's are bad Soldiers but some are repetitive and trouble. Punishment is not stern enough. Jailtime, confinement for time gone, field grade without a doubt, placement in another unit would reduce effects on CO morale. There needs to be a refinement in the way AWOL's are handled.

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Some Soldiers who go AWOL or desert may have good intentions. This could be due to a death in the family or a sickness. Financial reasons could also be a concern. I believe that if you cure and counsel Soldiers they will stay in this great Army. Sometimes all they need is support in the situations. Army leaders sometimes ignore the human factor in their Soldiers. Problems occur that need to be addressed now, not when they get time. However, there are Soldiers who cannot adapt to the Army. These Soldiers will eventually go AWOL or cause major problems within platoons and companies. Please remember this, it is the young sergeants and staff sergeants who are in the trenches with these Soldiers, and I believe educating them on effective counseling techniques could prevent some of these AWOLs.

In my experience as a drill sergeant and platoon sergeant prior to that, Soldiers who go AWOL understand that most punishment will be a CO grade or in some cases field grade. They take that opportunity to take free leave and know they will be given a second chance and if in training they will be sent to another unit to finish and then become problems for their gaining unit.

I believe that there are troubled Soldiers in today's Army, more than what the leadership thinks or cares about. Soldiers issues are identified but the solution is never resolved to the Soldiers satisfaction. More personal counseling and moral is helpful in some cases. The Army needs a concrete system to retain and retrain new Soldiers to build confidence. DI's a big part of the problem, leadership is at its weakest when it comes to Soldiers needs, and solving any problems that a soldier or family member may encounter.

In my opinion, Soldiers go AWOL and desert because they have made a decision that they will not change and that is that they do not want to be in the Army. I knew Soldiers that went AWOL and deserted, not under my direct supervision. Private \_\_\_\_ and Private \_\_\_\_\_. They made up in their mind that whatever they have to do to not continue to train in the Army they will do. Private \_\_\_\_ went AWOL twice and refuse to train and Private \_\_\_\_ refuse to train and eat until he was put in a correctional facility for 30 days. They never came back to train in the Army. I have another Soldier, that do not want to be here. He will not go AWOL and desert because he know what punishment he can receive. The Soldiers now have had suicidal threats and notes and wrote a letter to me to please help him get out of the Army. This Soldier have come from another unit and still fails to execute certain task because he says that he may kill himself. I do not believe that we should spend any more time with this Soldier. However, the Soldier will listen to leaders and confide in his battle buddies. If Soldiers go AWOL and desert, they are to the point in there life where they do not care what happen to themselves, they simply do not want to be here. Steps that can be taken to keep this from occurring will be along the lines of a detail in brief to the Soldiers when they are at the reception or recruiters office of what to expect and when the sign up, what there obligations will be. They basically need to understand AWOL and desertion will not be tolerated and they can not refuse to train!

The SM I was referring to was an IET SM. Should discharge SMs if they want out after they go to jail. If personal problem deal with on case by case basis.

Sign a contract for six years. Serve your country for six years, in a unit or correctional facility.

The Soldier has signed up for a term or enlistment in the military. He/she should be held to that term. If he/she goes AWOL they should be confined until they reach such ETS date on their enlistment.

A better screening process at recruiting level. Start with a better material, produce a better product.

Don't let dirtbags in. Get better Soldiers, ones who want to be here. Or let Drill SGTs cut them from the Army.

Soldier was motivated, helped other was good all around Soldier. Went home for exodus made some bad decisions. Rather than face UCMJ, went AWOL before punishment could impose.

Under this unit I have not seen AWOLs, but in other units Soldiers go AWOL 6 months to a year and gets integrated back to the unit goes to major deployment and comes back goes on leave and never comes back. This bring the morale of the unit down.

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Bottom line the punishment is too lenient. Hold them accountable for the actions regardless of the situation. Often too many Soldiers use many creative measures to justify the reason, but I strongly believe it is done just to cover their butt. We as Commander and leaders must not fall for many of our Soldiers excuses or justification for their actions.

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BCT is too relaxed for Soldiers today. The Soldiers know that the drill sergeants are limited to what they could do (for corrective training and/or punishment). At the end of BCT, we have the graduating Soldiers write down what changes would they do to BCT if they could change it. ALL stated that it should have been more physical--didn't get "smoked" like uncle/dad/grandfather said they would. BCT wasn't as much as a challenge as they thought it would be.

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Soldiers, or trainees, should be further inculcated into the Army way of life. Instead of finding out about the rigors of basic training on day one, more emphasis should be placed on recruiters and reception detachments to explain and teach Army values and our way of life. Soldiers should be screened more thoroughly for family issues, i.e., financial, spiritual, and personal prior to their arrival in basic training. In FORCOM units, counseling and an NCO's obligation to health and welfare should alleviate AWOLs. The punishment for AWOL is too lenient. Soldiers who go AWOL should be required to spend whatever their time remaining on their contract, from the day they went AWOL, in jail, upon apprehension. The Army is already capable of multi-level agencies to provide Soldiers with a multitude of solutions to their problems. AWOL should not be an option that Soldiers can think about as an easy fix.

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Desertion should be consider just like it use to be, a very serious crime. There is not room for them in the Army after they leave deserters should never return to Army unit in the Army other than jail. No sympathy.

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There's an exception for some Soldiers. Soldiers who go AWOL because of extreme circumstances like family doesn't have a place to live and children are very ill, I can understand wanting to go so bad and not having time to wait for all the paperwork to go through. I'll be willing to take him back and continue to train but for going AWOL over a girl or cause you don't like the Army. Get them out and keep them out.

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I feel that giving a Soldier an Article 15 (at any level) is not sufficient. They should be court martialed and spend time in confinement, then discharge dishonorably immediately upon release of confinement. I also agree that a Soldier who has returned from AWOL/desertion should promptly be removed from his unit and processed for discharged. He could possibly be a "cancer" to the other Soldiers in the unit. There would be more support from the chain of command when the immediate supervisor recommends separation, especially if the soldier is a "problem." The military should provide programs to leaders to give them general guidance in how to deal with problematic Soldiers and AWOLs. Something along the lines of communication skills and motivational speaking.

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If you go AWOL or desert than you should have to pay back all monies spent to train, feed, and pay you. You should then spend time in a Federal prison and lose all VA benefits and voting rights. The lost for freedom in the United States is a Soldier doing his duty. If you don't pay the price for freedom then you should not be afforded the rights you swore to defend.

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If Soldiers who have family members that are going through hardship, they should have a place they can reside with is closer to the service member. If they go AWOL past 31 days, they should be put in jail for however long they were AWOL. Discharge them dishonorably and then send them home. Most Soldiers go AWOL because it is an easy way out of the military. Most of these discharges will not affect the Soldier in civilian life. At the same time, if they don't want to be here than putting them out should be fast and easier. Being careful not to discriminate. If they don't want to be here, than we should not waste our time with them.

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I don't think that we need to waste anytime or resources trying rehabilitate deserters. The Army has already catered to them once during the recruitment phase, why should we have to keep doing that to get them to stay in. The punishment for desertion needs to be severe and well publicized so they can't say they didn't know. I think minimum 30 days confinement and have to pay Army back for all clothing issued regardless of condition.

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This Soldier was help on all levels. He was upset that his wife was treating in this matter. She used the reason he joined the Army against him. That was medical for his sick child. Once he told us his wife said it was costing \$1,000 for medication for his child and she had to pay up front. I personally called and got the Soldier to know the Army was taking care of his child. Because issues like this can bring the morale of a company down if word got out. On family day this Soldier was reunited with wife and child. At this time no one knows what was said or what was happening in this relationship . He decided to guard his wife than his country. Upon entering the Army I try to let Soldiers know this will try a relationship weak or strong. Remember you are making a change for the better and your spouse may feel they maybe left behind or may not. Be as needed if you can be away from them for 26 weeks. If they say they are going to leave you then it is a matter of time before they will anyway. And once they say it even if you go AWOL for them, in your mind you will always remember that and the relationship is forever changed.

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Start going after AWOL PVTs and court marshal them. It sounds simple and it is, pay a little now and earn a lot back later.

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This Soldier was not going to be asset to the Army so I don't think we should continue to spend out taxpayer dollars on him. Since it's evident that he doesn't want to be here, we shouldn't waste anymore time with him other than what's needed to separate him from the Army. I think that once a Soldier goes and he/she needs to separated from the military immediately with no questions asked.

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In this training environment, not only is the Soldier adjusting to Army life, so is his/her family. Ensure recruiters include family members in discussions with prospective Soldier. Spouses should be enrolled in DEERS/Tricare either at MEPS or reception prior to training or once Soldier reaches 1st duty station not during training. Training should be tough and stressful to either "weed out" those incompatible with Army life or to increase the confidence of new Soldiers to overcome various situations. BCT has become "kinder and gentler" since I went thru BCT. The punishment for AWOL/desertion is too lenient. The possibility of being arrested/apprehended does not carry much weight. An Article 15 and/or discharged (uncharacterized) is no more than a slap on the wrist. Confinement then dishonorable discharge would send a much stronger message not to go AWOL/desert. As a volunteer Army, the punishment for breaking your contract (going against your word) should be severe.

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Any and all "Soldiers" who desert should spend the rest of their term of service in jail! Not nearly enough is being done to punish these individuals!

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Soldiers in training usually go AWOL because they are already in trouble and don't want to face their punishment or recycling. If we actually USED the punishment we have in the book for going AWOL instead of just chaptering them upon their return. You would see a severe decrease in the number of AWOLs. For the simple reason that they know when they finally get caught they are going to jail.

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Punishment is to easy on AWOL. Once one person goes AWOL and everyone sees that nothing really happens to them, that gets everyone realizing that it isn't that bad to go AWOL.

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Once this Soldier found out that his future unit was very likely to deploy, he went AWOL. Soldier called the commander to see or to tell him he would come back if he could get his duty station changed. If the commander would have accommodated him, it would have weakened the Army. These Soldiers need to not only be separated, but severely punished to serve as an example to others.

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This Soldiers was prior service he spent 8 years in the Army before he got out then he decided to come back in. He just couldn't deal with the fact that he had to do all training with privates, even on the weekend he thought he was lowering himself to their level. Prior service Soldiers need to be made understood that that will have to do the same training as IET PVTs before they come back in the Army. They are given a lot more privileges then PVTs but still have to hold the same standard so that they can get adjusted back into today's Army.

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AWOL Soldiers should be outprocessed as soon as possible so they don't interrupt the unit cohesion and well being. I think the stronger punishment will help deter Soldiers going AWOL.

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He was a good Soldier, worked well with others and caused no problems. Had medical problems prior to joining but continued to train.

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I feel Soldier going AWOL or are deserter should be confined.

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AWOL/deserters should be put in jail.

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This Soldier knew before he went AWOL that nothing severe would be done to him. He had a plan and knew that going AWOL was an easy ticket out of the Army. Yes, his plan worked and he got over on the Army.

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Everything should be done case by case. But stats shouldn't dictate if Soldiers stay or go! OER or NCOER billets shouldn't determine quality Soldiers.... Meaning I want an excellence block so I'm only going to give 5 Article 15s this cycle and new start 3 raising the percentage from 50-60% from last cycle!

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Soldier should have been identified during time of enlistment

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If it were easier to change a Soldiers duty station with another private who wants to go to that duty station in special circumstances it would help the problem in this Soldier's situation.

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He was in week 4 of OSUT.

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